

ENHANCING VALUE FOR NONPROFIT COMMUNITY PARTNERS IN  
COMMUNITY- ENGAGED LEARNING INITIATIVES

By

WENDY LOUISE MACDONALD  
BA Recreation Administration, University of Alberta, 1975

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In

LEADERSHIP

We accept this thesis as conforming  
to the required standard

.....  
Catherine C. Cole, MA, Project Sponsor

.....  
Jim Force, PhD, Project Supervisor

.....  
P. Gerry Nixon, PhD, Committee Chair

ROYAL ROADS UNIVERSITY  
March 2008

©Wendy MacDonald, 2008

ABSTRACT

Campus–community partnerships provide diverse experiential learning opportunities, often undertaken through student placements in community-based nonprofit organizations. These partnerships, which include service-learning, are perceived as a pedagogically valuable approach to student learning. Universities and colleges, as well as nonprofit organizations and the wider community, potentially gain value from the relationships. These collaborations must be mutually beneficial to be sustained and developed. As demand for community-engaged learning placements grows, and the capacity of nonprofit organization partners to integrate students is challenged, disproportionate costs and benefits may threaten the sustainability of these partnerships, without enhanced collaboration efforts. Through qualitative action research, involving narrative inquiry, the research examines what factors build and consume the capacity of nonprofit organizations during their involvement in community-engaged learning initiatives involving student placements. Opportunities to build reciprocal relationships, create social capital, develop human resources, contribute to learning, and support systemic change were viewed as factors contributing value.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dedicated to my husband, Ken MacDonald, for his unconditional support in our journey together, and to my parents, Alf and Sheila Petersen, and their parents, Alfred and Ada Petersen and Angus and Laura McGugan, for teaching me about community, leadership, and life-long learning.

With special thanks to Jim Force, who has inspired me in leadership and learning, and to the Royal Roads MA Lead 2006-2 cohort for the remarkable learning community that sustained me in my studies. I am grateful for the support of my sponsoring organization, the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, the generosity of my sponsor, Catherine C. Cole, and the perspectives of Beth Hunter, Russ Dahms, Kelly Sloan, and Val Mayes in enabling this research. I am indebted to the community partners, who as research participants shared their experiences with such commitment. With appreciation to my daughters, Kate and Kris, and to my wonderful friends, family, and colleagues for their encouragement, belief, and support. Finally thank you to Karen Graham for her patient skill and teaching.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
List of Tables.....	viii
Chapter One: Focus and Framing.....	1
The Opportunity .....	4
Significance of the Opportunity .....	7
Systems Analysis of the Opportunity .....	9
Organizational Context .....	12
Sponsor.....	13
Chapter Two: Literature Review .....	15
Community-Engaged Learning and Service-Learning .....	15
Definition, Evolution, and Goals .....	16
Stakeholders in Service-Learning .....	19
Absence of Community-Based Organization Perspective .....	21
Comparative Views of Volunteerism and Service Learning .....	23
Emerging Views of Service-Learning.....	27
Partnership and Collaboration in Community-Engaged Learning .....	29
Elements of Partnership and Collaboration.....	30
Evolution and Institutionalization of Campus-Community Partnerships .....	31
Complexity, Relationships and Partnership Synergy.....	32
Coordination and Infrastructure.....	33
The Changing Role of Scholarship in Community Engagement.....	35
Assessment in Campus-Community Partnerships .....	36
Mutuality, Reciprocity and Power .....	38
Transactional and Transformational Partnership .....	40
Success Factors in Campus-Community Partnerships .....	41
Capacity and Community-Based Nonprofit Organizations .....	44
Components of Nonprofit Organization Capacity .....	45
External Influences on Organizational Capacity .....	46
Collaboration as Capacity Building .....	47
Social and Network Capital as Capacity .....	48
Issues in Capacity Building .....	48
Summary and Relationship to Inquiry .....	50
Chapter Three: Research Approach and Methodology .....	51
Action Research Approach.....	51
Research Methodology .....	54
Inquiry Tools .....	56
Unobtrusive Approaches .....	56

Interactive Methods.....	56
Participants .....	60
Data Analysis .....	63
Ethical Issues .....	64
Informed Consent.....	66
Privacy and Confidentiality.....	66
Harm and Benefits .....	66
Researcher Bias.....	69
Conflict of Interest .....	69
Chapter Four: Results and Conclusions.....	71
Data Analysis .....	71
Study Findings.....	73
Contextual Issues Influencing Community-Engaged Learning Placements .....	75
Stories of Collaboration .....	80
Creating Value through Relationship.....	80
When a Present is Not a Gift?.....	86
Working Together Tomorrow.....	94
Towards Enhanced Practice.....	97
Study Conclusions .....	99
Seeing Fully: Interdependence and Systems Awareness .....	100
Knowledge of the Voluntary and Nonprofit Sector.....	101
Cross-Sectoral Collaborations as Cross-Cultural Relationships .....	102
The Value of Social Capital and Community Engagement Opportunities .....	102
Student Placements as a Human Resources Development Strategy.....	103
Partner Preparation and Support .....	103
Student Preparation and Support.....	104
Balanced Effort and Outcome.....	105
Timing and Duration of Placement .....	106
Just Say No!: The Ability of Community Partners to Decline Placements .....	107
The Reciprocity Expressed in the Relationship .....	107
Transactional and Transformational Goals and Outcomes .....	108
Holistic Institutional Perspective versus Program-Centric Focus .....	109
Respect and Professionalism .....	111
Investment in Infrastructure.....	111
Faculty and Staff Recognition and Support.....	112
Scope and Limitation of the Research .....	113
Limited Scope of Sub-Sector.....	114
Size and Current Capacity of the Organization .....	114
Personal Experience is Situational.....	115
Role in Organization .....	115
Impact of Environment Factors .....	115
Common Definitions.....	116
Researcher Skill and Bias.....	116
Summary .....	116

Chapter Five: Research Implications.....	117
Recommendations.....	117
Recommendation #1: Identify, Recognize, and Promote Effective Community-Engaged Learning Partnerships.....	117
Recommendation #2: Universities and Colleges Should Develop and Implement Policy that Supports Effective Consultation and Program Development, Related to Learning Partnerships .....	118
Recommendation #3: Create Institutional Infrastructure, Support and Accountability for Community-Engaged Learning .....	118
Recommendation #4: Recognize and Support both Nonprofit Organization Staff and Campus Faculty for their Involvement in Community- Engagement Initiatives .....	121
Recommendation #5: Create Mechanisms and Policy that Recognize Community Access to the College or University and their Related Networks.....	122
Recommendation #6: Identify and Support Long-Term Community Relationships that have the Potential to Create Systemic Change.....	123
Recommendation #7: Convene Dialogue Related to the Coordination and Effectiveness of Local Capacity Building and Intermediary Organizations in Supporting Students and Faculty.....	123
Recommendation #8: Make Models, Tools, and Resources Related to Community-Engaged Learning Available to All Stakeholders .....	124
Recommendation #9: Support Organizations that Require Capacity- Building Assistance to Strengthen Their Ability to Involve Students and Engage in more Productive Campus-Community Work .....	125
Recommendation # 10: Develop Partnership and Cross-Cultural Competence .....	126
Recommendation # 11: Link Community-Engaged Learning more Intentionally to Human Resource and Labour Force Planning.....	126
Recommendation #12: Change and Collaborative Leadership .....	127
Implications for Future Research .....	128
The Impact of Community-Engaged Learning in the K–12 Education System .....	128
Effective Mechanisms for Campus–Community Communication.....	129
Longitudinal Studies of Community Engagement Outcomes Related to Campus–Community Learning Partnerships .....	129
Institutionalization of Community-Engaged Learning .....	129
Implications for Sponsoring Organization .....	130
Chapter Six: Lessons Learned.....	132
The Value of Dialogue.....	132
Learning through Reflection .....	132
When to Establish Framework .....	133
Creating Space.....	134
Small Steps Get You There.....	134
Complexity .....	135

Work in Ways Congruent with Who You Are .....	135
It Is Never Too Late.....	135
The Power of Narrative.....	136
Speaking for Others .....	136
Learning as Collaboration.....	137
Concluding Comments.....	137
References.....	139
Appendix A: Interview Questions.....	147
Appendix B: Research Consent Form .....	148
Appendix C: Invitation to Participate in Research.....	151
Appendix D: Electronic Mail Follow Up Invitation.....	154

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Average Organization Size, Budget, and Volunteer Activity Related to U/C  
Student Placements (Annual) .....63

## CHAPTER ONE: FOCUS AND FRAMING

Community service-learning and other forms of community-engaged learning have developed over many decades, as pedagogically valuable elements of higher learning. Community organizations and projects are used as real-life learning labs for students, which provide opportunities for experience, skill development, relationship-building, and reflective learning. These curriculum-related learning activities take place in a community setting, rather than in an educational institution. Community-based nonprofit organizations are hosts for many of these experiential learning activities, which support learning in a wide range of primary, secondary, and post-secondary education programs. Service-learning “links academic coursework to community volunteer work, by building partnerships between students, faculty and community organizations” (Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations [ECVO], 2007b, ¶ 1).

Formal service-learning and other community-engaged learning programs have developed over the past forty years, primarily in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and much more recently, Canada. Effective service-learning outcomes require a mutually-beneficial partnership to maximize the learning potential of the initiative and to provide value for all parties. Critical partners in a service-learning program include a supportive educational institution composed of faculty, students, and administration. A cooperative, nonprofit community partner usually includes practitioner staff and paid or volunteer organizational leaders.

From my experience as a college faculty member, who is involved in many forms of community-based learning, as a former senior manager in a nonprofit organization, and as a colleague to staff in numerous voluntary sector organizations, I believe this

relationship has become increasingly unbalanced, with decreasing sustainability. The outcomes of community-engaged learning activities often become net costs to nonprofit community partners, rather than the benefit they are perceived to be. In essence, the cost to the nonprofit organization exceeds the value of the relationship, at least in the short term.

Community-engaged learning policies and processes are often structured by the education institutions involved, without significant consultation with community partners. The purpose, capacity, and length of relationships with community partners vary widely. Because of this diversity, university and college program structures and expectations may not be aligned with the assets and needs of all community partners. This contributes to discord, which is not often openly discussed or resolved. The benefits of community-engaged learning, especially service-learning, are critical to the future effectiveness of both learning and community capacity. Fuller understanding of what will sustain and develop nonprofit organization involvement is primary to future success.

As a young adult and university student, I was drawn to career-related volunteerism through self-initiated, community volunteer activities. While these activities were not formally acknowledged for course credit, collectively they helped me fulfill work experience requirements related to a practicum and taught me much. I was encouraged to reflect on and write about my volunteer-related learning as an aspect of my practicum requirement. These experiences magnified my interest and motivation significantly and quickly led to diverse volunteer leadership roles. These volunteer leadership experiences prepared me for future paid career roles, as well as a lifelong commitment to community volunteerism. According to the *Canadian Survey of Giving*

*and Participating* (Statistics Canada, 2004), using one's skills and experience, exploring one's strengths, and improving job opportunities are among the top eight motivators to volunteering in Canada. Volunteering served as a powerful source of motivation, learning, and self-actualization to me. I became committed to promoting the value of community-based, experiential learning.

Today, I find myself in a unique role as a college faculty member responsible for a range of educational programming related to the nonprofit and voluntary sector, as well as working closely in other roles with community organizations. My dual perspectives, of both the nonprofit and academic communities, fuel my interest in the role of nonprofit community partners in community-engaged-learning initiatives. Further to these roles, my academic interest relates to human resource issues in the voluntary sector, both paid employees and volunteers, with emphasis on motivation and learning.

The research question I chose to explore in my research was: "How can community- engaged learning partnerships, involving Universities and Colleges, effectively add value and build capacity for nonprofit community partners?" The following sub-questions acted as a catalyst for dialogue.

1. What do nonprofit community partners value in their community-engaged learning involvement with College and University student placements?
2. What challenges de-value the potential benefits of these community-engaged learning partnerships to nonprofit community partners?
3. What factors contribute to capacity building through community-engaged learning partnerships for the nonprofit community partners?

4. How might all stakeholders in community-engaged learning initiatives, involving student placements, consider these factors in their practice?

#### The Opportunity

“Community service-learning is intended to be a mutual exchange in which the needs of community partners, as well as the needs of the University to foster academic learning, are met” (ECVO, 2007b, ¶ 4).

The nonprofit/voluntary sector in Canada is critical to both the purpose and positive outcomes of service-learning and other forms of community-engaged learning. The sector is extremely diverse in focus, purpose, size, and capacity. Hall et al. (2003) describe the current and emerging challenges to Canada’s nonprofit and voluntary organizations in all areas of organizational capacity. Growing instability in core financial resources, coupled with human resource challenges in both the paid and volunteer workforces, make Canada’s nonprofit and voluntary organizations vulnerable to net loss of capacity and resources. Furthermore, it has been my experience that student placement activities, such as service-learning, are sometimes interpreted by prospective community partners as distractions to core mission and operations. While many forms of community-engaged learning potentially create benefits for nonprofit organizations, they can also become a capacity drain, if equitable and mutual benefits do not accrue in relation to those generated in support of student, faculty, and institutional goals. Leiderman, Furco, Zapf, and Gross (2003) describe these challenges from the community partner’s perspective. They note that follow-through, costs compared to benefits, and parity in relationships are critical to maintaining effective relationships with community partners.

Statistics Canada (2004) states that more than 7% of Canadian volunteers over the age of 14 years are involved in mandated volunteering, much of which supports their formal educational commitments. A large amount of Canada's community service-learning is mandated through provincial legislation or through curriculum decisions by school boards and institutions. While many student placements are very useful to the nonprofit organizations in which they occur, others become a liability, if the infrastructure and support required for effective outcomes become a burden to the nonprofit community organization (Graff, 2006). The needs and assets of nonprofit community partners must be well understood to create and sustain healthy partnerships that generate mutual value.

The benefits of community-engaged learning to students and to institutions of higher learning are well documented through research. Less well examined are the value and potential benefits related to the third element of learning relationship, the nonprofit community partner. This may be due to the many opportunities for faculty and students to study their own environment as part of their scholarly activity (Gass, 2005). Nonprofit community partners are less likely to have the resources to direct to these activities. The existing research about community partners, which has informed practice, is largely administrative and policy oriented and limited in dimension. Cruz and Giles (2000) state, "The lack of research on the community dimensions of service-learning is a glaring omission in the literature. Analysis of the causes of this gap indicates that community-focused research is possible and desirable" (¶ 1). The authors posit that research should focus on the community–university partnership as the unit of analysis, and the research should use a participatory action research approach. The Canadian Association for

Community Service-Learning (2007a) also notes that additional research, related to the needs and contributions of community partners, is a priority in the development of a Canadian community service-learning movement. This leaves many opportunities to support systematic inquiry into the assets and needs of nonprofit community partners in deepening commitment to community-engaged learning, while adding value to their organizations.

The academic context of a university demands formal research as a catalyst for change. Within the community-engaged learning experience, greater understanding of the culture, capacity, needs, and goals of nonprofit organizations may facilitate change in relationships and processes, making partnerships more sustainable. Without credible data related to the community-engaged learning goals of nonprofit community partners, change is unlikely to be supported by colleges, universities, or external collaborators, such as funders, public policy makers, community agency networks, and other capacity-building organizations.

I believe that exploring these issues in campus-community partnerships has challenged my skills, experience, and learning. Facilitating study that spanned organizational and sectoral cultures, and the recognition of structural, human resources, political, and symbolic issues of each (Bolman & Deal, 2003), has allowed me to better understand more complex systems. At the same time, encouraging dialogue between groups that are interdependent, but not fully aware of each other's assets and needs, has provided new learning and a possible catalyst for change.

### Significance of the Opportunity

Holland (2001) notes that the future of community–university partnerships depends on effective assessment strategies that produce evidence of value for all stakeholders. She also stresses the importance of inquiry into consistent quality of effort, respect, trust, motivation, and learning. Finally, she illustrates the value of assessment in celebration, as well as in generating curiosity about other potential outcomes.

The research question I explored provided opportunities to deepen understanding of issues that influence participation by nonprofit community partners in hosting students in community-engaged learning initiatives. This understanding may inform opportunities for change in practice and development by postsecondary institutions and policy makers, which in turn may sustain critical relationships with Edmonton region nonprofit organizations. At the same time, this inquiry may contribute to enriching current literature, which is limited in representing the perspectives of the nonprofit community.

It is important that the voices of nonprofit community partners be more fully present in dialogue about the value of higher education learning partnerships with community based organizations. The nonprofit community perspective must also be heard to develop the untapped assets that community partners could offer in deeper partnership engagement. Stringer (1999) notes,

As practitioners develop programs and services or seek to solve problems that threaten the efficacy of services for which we are responsible, we need to take into account the impacts of those developments and solutions on the lives of the people we serve. (p. 21)

Currently, most community-engaged learning research questions focus on operational and administrative issues facing nonprofit partners. They do not fully engage these community partners in richer, reflective discussion that may add significant value to

the overall outcomes of community-engaged learning. More extensive inquiry, which includes individuals in varied nonprofit organizational roles who have broader perspectives on mission and long-term strategy, provides new insight into other benefits and outcomes. This may, in turn, encourage greater motivation for nonprofit community partners to invest more fully in campus- community learning initiatives.

Many service-learning initiatives and other forms of community-engaged learning partnerships are in their infancy. They have contributed significantly to enhancing learning for partners, thus connecting universities, colleges, and other institutions to their wider community. At the same time, these activities potentially develop additional human resources for current and future community initiatives through volunteer and staff roles. Each of these benefits includes a host of other related issues critical to the future of both community-engaged experiential learning and capacity in the nonprofit sector. Based on my experience with cross-sectoral partnerships, I believe that this continued successful growth and the participation of multiple, nonprofit community partners cannot be sustained if deeper dialogue and reflection does not occur. Without continuous learning and adaptation to the needs and assets of participating and potential nonprofit community partners, the community-based foundation of such experiential learning will not endure. Without enhanced understanding of these issues and a desire to change and evolve processes, broaden goals, and create added-value, community-engaged learning partnerships are in danger of losing support from community partners. Inequitable relationships, capacity and resource issues, untapped assets, and lack of perceived long- and short-term value to the individual nonprofit organizations may contribute to this loss.

## Systems Analysis of the Opportunity

Voluntary, nonprofit, or non-governmental (NGO) organizations form a significant part of democratic communities worldwide. In Canada, more than 161,000 formally constituted organizations exist, fuelled by volunteers, paid staff, and a host of other external supporters, including funders (Statistics Canada, 2003). In Alberta, 19,000 voluntary and nonprofit sector groups exist formally (p. 8). In Edmonton, there are an estimated 8,000 nonprofit organizations (ECVO, 2007a, ¶ #). These organizations and their capacity are fundamental to the functioning of many sectors in Canada and to a healthy democracy (Hall et al., 2003). The focus of most nonprofit organizations is to deliver service or advocate for change in the world. Both the assets and needs of this sector have become more widely identified as key factors in the development and sustainability of a civil society.

At the same time, experiential learning has grown in popularity as a significant form of learning for individuals of all ages (Breunig, 2005; Gass, 2005). Kindergarten participants through to university graduate students commonly engage in forms of community-engaged experiential learning, including service-learning. Examples include students participating in religion programs, which link scriptures to performing specific acts of community service in the K–12 system in Catholic schools, through to university and college students in programs that facilitate activities linked to health promotion, environmental issues, and intergenerational theatre. In some cases, service is mandatory as part of defined curriculum, although service-learning is generally an optional approach to studies in higher education. There is often an assumption that learning in the community is free, as is the integration of volunteers and students into community

initiatives. Increasingly, infrastructure costs associated with the growing complexity of nonprofit organizations make involving unskilled individuals in short-term roles difficult and costly. In my experience, many nonprofit organizations have inadequate resources to support formal community volunteer engagement, let alone rising numbers of student experiential learners.

Service-learning has been a significant movement in the United States over the past four decades, from which much can be learned. There is, however, a distinctive Canadian approach to the development of an emerging service-learning movement (Canadian Association for Community Service-Learning [CACSL], 2007b; McConnell Foundation, 2007). In the United States, significant public funding and resources are invested in service-learning as a foundation of citizenship or civics education. In Canada, recognition of and resourcing for service-learning is modest and primarily funded by private foundations. In Canada, the McConnell Foundation has played a key leadership role in supporting university-based service-learning programs (McConnell Foundation). This minimal support by public and private funding may be because of the relative newness of this concept in Canada, lack of significant government policy, and the more independent nature of the Canadian voluntary sector.

Currently, in Canada, the voluntary and nonprofit sector is experiencing significant capacity challenges. While the assets of the sector are many and the value of the work of these organizations critical to civil society, a number of factors have reduced the ability of the sector to fully participate in the life of the community. Hall et al. (2003) describe five aspects of organizational capacity: (a) financial, (b) human resources, (c) infrastructure and process, (d) planning and development, and (e) relationship and

network. These are influenced by historical factors, access to resources, and environmental restraints and facilitators. To survive, nonprofit organizations must consider strategies and activities that develop or sustain capacity, while managing factors that reduce ability to meet the mission of the organization. All forms of community-engaged learning will likely be diminished without consideration of this trend by formal education systems, especially universities and colleges.

In recent years, many institutions of higher learning have renewed their commitment to community connection and service, which has been seen by many to have been eroded in periods of rapid growth, changing priorities, and economic challenges. Community service is a cornerstone of most colleges and universities, but how it is manifested varies widely. Community-engaged learning and service-learning, in particular, are means to connecting to the wider community, while achieving academic and community-engagement goals. For this reason, many institutions have integrated more experiential learning opportunities into curricular and co-curricular activity. Institutions of higher learning require a relationship with nonprofit community partners to fulfill these mandates.

Community-based hosts are key to experiential learning, particularly service-learning, which requires large numbers of non-profit community partners to co-facilitate the process and ground the experience. Service-learning is dependent upon the cooperation of diverse nonprofit partners to effectively link curriculum with a variety of experiences. Government, educational institutions, voluntary and nonprofit organizations, funders, and many other stakeholders in the wider community share values related to volunteer engagement, learning, and community development. Authentic collaboration,

which benefits all partners, is the key to sustainability of these important relationships. In summary, growth in expectation of student involvement in service-learning and other forms of community-based experiential learning has potentially exceeded the capacity of nonprofit organizations to effectively host and gain value from these relationships.

### Organizational Context

The Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations describes its mandate as providing leadership and mobilizing the collective resources of the voluntary sector, to enhance programs, services, operations and governance of not-for-profit organizations in the Edmonton region (2007a). The Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (ECVO) is a legally incorporated, nonprofit organization, as well as a registered charity in Canada, founded by a variety of community-based, not-for-profit organizations. ECVO strives to support the work of its members and partners not to duplicate their efforts. Service occurs through a range of initiatives: networking meetings, creating coalitions with other organizations, meetings with key-decision makers at various levels of government, information sessions and learning opportunities, research, and publications. ECVO is governed by an elected board of directors and guided by organizational bylaws and policy. ECVO is managed by an Executive Director, who is supported by a small paid staff and service volunteers. One paid staff position related specifically to service-learning partnerships, the Community Partner Liaison, is funded by the Edmonton Community Foundation and hosted by ECVO. This staff person connects member organizations with university students from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta (2006), through a structured Community Service-Learning program. While this is

a formal partnership, it is only one approach to many service-learning activities in which member organizations participate and is not the focus of the research.

Member organizations of ECVO are independently incorporated, nonprofit organizations and charities that are not governed by or accountable to ECVO. They represent diverse interests and disciplines, and individuals may also become Associate Members (ECVO, 2007a). ECVO is engaged in many collaborative activities with a variety of local, provincial, and national partners.

### Sponsor

ECVO has a mandate to advocate for the needs of member organizations collectively. The organizational focus is on crosscutting issues that impact nonprofit and voluntary organizations, which represent a wide variety of disciplines and sub-sectors. Community-engaged and service-learning issues impact most of their constituency. A board member, Catherine C. Cole, has supported this research as sponsor liaison, an arrangement approved through the Board of Directors. A new Executive Director joined the organization near the beginning of the research inquiry and as ECVO was in a staff leadership transition, board involvement in the research was seen as important. I also worked closely with the Executive Director, Russ Dahms, in operational matters that required management support, particularly member access. Both the board member and the Executive Director had significant experience in Edmonton's nonprofit community, through former Executive Director, Board, and consulting roles. This was very helpful in identifying issues and perspectives relevant to the research themes and their relationship to ECVO, its member organizations, and other nonprofit organizations in the wider community. Choosing ECVO as a sponsor ensures that the perspective of nonprofit

community partners is primary and that the action research is more likely to impact change within multiple organizations. The disadvantage of this sponsorship may have been a perceived bias in favour of nonprofit community partners and a loss in a wider viewpoint inclusive of more stakeholders, based on the focus and perspective of the work.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Exploring how community-engaged learning initiatives benefit their community-based nonprofit partners involves examining the convergence of several distinct systems. These are the worlds of academia: Universities and Colleges, the realm of the student, and the arena of the nonprofit, community organization. This convergence generates three focused themes that provide the context for further inquiry. The first is community-engaged and service-learning—their definitions, history, subsets, and purpose. The second is the actual point where stakeholders in community-engaged learning converge and the implications for partnership and collaboration. Finally, the community-based nonprofit partner, the focus of the inquiry, and the unit of the research analysis is examined with respect to its capacity to achieve its mission.

## Community-Engaged Learning and Service-Learning

The first thematic collection of work reviewed, community-engaged learning and service-learning assists in framing the inquiry, in defining terminology and parameters, in positioning the research within the context of learning, and in identifying the related stakeholders. This review also illustrates the espoused purpose of the learning initiatives discussed and compares them to other forms of community service. The absence of a community partner perspective in the literature is identified. Community-engaged learning is a relatively recently-coined term, and much of the literature related to these themes comes from the body of research defined as service-learning. However, this literature often encompasses broader community-engaged learning issues as well. Finally, emerging views of community-engaged learning are reviewed.

*Definition, Evolution, and Goals*

Community-engaged learning is a form of experiential learning that is grounded in experience generated in community-based organizations. Community-engaged learning spans the continuum of curricular experiential learning opportunities that link directly to community. The continuum includes learning experiences that connect academic study with applied community-based experiences, such as practicums, field placements, internships, and service-learning. A subset of community-engaged learning is community service-learning, which adds an intentional element of service and reflection to its practice (Jacoby, 2003).

The pedagogy of experiential learning explores the cyclical pattern of learning, which links experience, reflection, conceptualization, and action (Kolb, 1984). Experiential learning may occur when an individual reflects on an informal experience and learns in the process. Experiential learning can be skilfully facilitated within the realm of the traditional classroom, or it may shift to the wider community as the learning landscape. This landscape is often called community-engaged learning. Collectively, these experiences enlarge and enrich the canvas on which learners can experience, think about, draw conclusions from, and act upon their learning.

Service-learning is an intentional curricular-based relationship between an educational institution, students, and a community organization, for the purpose of student learning, through experience and reflection. Service-learning involves students in activities that address community needs, allowing for structured opportunities designed to promote student learning and development. Reflection and reciprocity are key concepts of service learning (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Holland, 2001; Jacoby et al., 1996). Service-

learning offers students an opportunity to discover the connections between the theoretical realm of the classroom and the practical assets and needs of the community. Collectively, it reinforces the skills of collaborative activity, critical thinking, public discourse, and community building. The learning context for the service activity requires students to reflect upon their service experiences in relation to community values and civic ideals, as well as course content (Jacoby et al., 1996; Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997; Ostrander, 2004; Ramaley, 2000). Perhaps the most important long-term benefit of service-learning is the opportunity for students to connect to a community and identify their roles as citizens in that community and the wider world. Putnam (2000) notes the emerging disconnect between individuals and community, recognizing the need for approaches that generate social capital through engagement with one another. Service learning acts as an enabler for such activity (Jacoby, 2003; Ostrander, 2004).

Ostrander (2004) defines other components of service-learning as student learning, curriculum transformation, community-defined priorities, and knowledge production. Vickers, Harris, and McCarthy (2004) suggest service-learning is “a conduit for the development and maintenance of meaningful, symbiotic relationships between the university and the community” (p. 129). Jacoby (2003) also refers to service-learning as being a philosophy and, to some, a political stance. Each of these latter definitions alludes to relationships that yield learning and change, by multiple players, through exchange and interdependence.

Both community-engaged learning and service-learning build on earlier models of experiential learning (Dewey, as cited in Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997). Dewey believes that reflective thought and action is critical to real and democratic learning, which serves

a social purpose. Such learning approaches are inclusive, reinforcing the value and worth of all. Jacoby (2003) describes service-learning as evolving from the work of theorists, including John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Donald Shon, Kurt Lewin, and David Kolb. Jacoby further notes that service-learning acts as both a partnership and as pedagogy, when we consider the visible emphasis on reflection as a key aspect of learning.

Current understanding of service-learning has also evolved from movements to address the limited understanding of young people about their connections to the public and community life around them. The early practice of service-learning started as a vehicle for civics education, with a focus on community improvement, which shifted to the term community service and later service-learning (Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997). More recently, a perceived decline in civic engagement in North American contemporary society (Putnam, 2000) has led to significant policy development and large investments in service learning in the United States over the past four decades (Butin, 2005; Holland, 2001; Jacoby et al., 1996). This investment has generated a significant volume of research to support further expansion of the approach, particularly from the perspective of institutions of higher learning.

In the United States, government, as well as institutions of higher learning, has supported the formalization of service-learning partnerships. For example, the Campus Compact is a partnership of more than eight hundred colleges and universities, lead by their Presidents, who formally collaborate to develop resources, create policy, and undertake research in support of service-learning (Jacoby et al., 1996). This level of support is in its infancy in Canada, with most formal support being provided by private

foundations, as catalyst to engage others (Canadian Association for Community Service-Learning, 2007a; Hayes & King, 2006; McConnell Foundation, 2007).

Two contrasting themes have emerged in the literature. The dominant perspective consistently illustrates the benefits accrued to students and society from service learning and advocates for continuing institutionalization of the concept (Jacoby et al., 1996). The other stream challenges the lack of authenticity in actually achieving democracy through such initiatives, when driven by large institutional systems. Also in question are the equity and justice issues, which result from power inequity in such relationships (Marullo & Edwards, 2000; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000).

#### *Stakeholders in Service-Learning*

The literature describes a number of service-learning stakeholders and the potential benefits accrued by all partners. Vickers et al. (2004) define the service-learning partnership as involving three primary stakeholders. Interdependent relationships exist between community agencies, faculty, and students. These relationships require trust and reciprocity to sustain. Vickers et al. maintain that, without one of the partners, the triad would collapse and result in more traditional and separate forms of volunteerism and education.

When done correctly, service learning combines strong ties among partners involved in the activities, and fluid and reciprocal forms of learning and reflection among all participants. . . . The best service learning programs are derived from existing strengths and interests of different institutions and people involved.  
(p. 133)

This interdependence has been further supported by Holland (2001), who states, “The work of service-learning is complex and multidimensional; it depends upon a university-

community collaboration in which all parties identify shared goals but also have distinct perspectives” (p. 52).

Maurrasse (2002) notes that mutual gains, for both the university and community, are critical in sustaining support for service-learning involvement. Student partners gain from service-learning through the acquisition of new skills, application of theory, reflection, and learning related to technical and transferable skills, as well as development of citizenship and social responsibility (Holland, 2001; Jacoby, 2003; Jacoby et al., 1996; Leiderman et al., 2003). Nonprofit community partners perceive potential benefits to include advancement of their missions, insight and learning, an expanded human and financial resource base, access to research opportunities, and credibility within the wider community (Leiderman et al.; Sandy & Holland, 2006). Other benefits to community organizations might include: (a) enhanced capacity, access to university resources and networks, (b) opportunity to engage prospective volunteers and employees, (c) an expanded human resources potential, (d) learning, and (e) greater community awareness of the organization and its constituents (Edwards, Mooney, & Heald, 2001, p. 447).

Universities and colleges, as institutions, also find value in service-learning activities and relationships. Ostrander (2004) notes that civic engagement by universities is primarily motivated by the need to ground academia in real-world conditions, to move knowledge to practice, to improve conditions in local communities, to link academics and practitioners, and, finally, to build democracy and civil society. Universities are often encouraged to develop community relationships, including service-learning, to maintain social relevance, defend their legitimacy and societal contribution, be seen as being good citizens, and develop specific knowledge desired by numerous and diverse constituencies.

(Jacoby, 2003; Marullo & Edwards, 2000). They further suggest that holistic student-centred learning, local social concerns, as well as enrolment and budget declines also influence universities to invest in community-engagement strategies. Finally, they posit that service-learning is the leading pedagogy that provides universities and colleges the opportunity to demonstrate civic engagement and richer attainment of their missions, if focused on social justice and equity.

*Absence of Community-Based Organization Perspective*

Several authors note the absence of research related to the outcomes of service-learning on nonprofit community partners. Worrall (2007) notes how little is known about community perspective, and how critical the sustained involvement of such organizations is on service-learning success. As Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2000) note, the community is recognized only in relation to other partners, rather than in any robust way. Edwards et al. (2001) state,

Moreover the growing research on the impact of service–learning and community–based learning (CBL) programs focuses almost exclusively on students. The impacts on communities, clients and the nonprofit organizations under whose direction students perform. . . . have been neglected. . . . The studies that do examine the impact of CBL programs on organizations often rely on anecdotal evidence. (p. 445)

Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2000) offer further explanation, observing that the research literature related to service learning illustrates an interesting view of what researchers value. The emphasis in this literature is almost exclusively on positive outcomes that service-learning provides for students. Although the community potentially benefits from community service-learning, these benefits are not described in any detail or breadth in the literature. Ward and Wolf-Wendel further posit that the lack of focus on the community-based partners has arisen, in part, out of the challenging relationship that

can exist between academics and their surrounding community. These relationships focus more on drawing boundaries, differences in priorities, and defining where the generation and ownership of knowledge exists, rather than on mutuality and reciprocity.

Sandy and Holland (2006) question, “What would we hear if we listened to community partners about their experiences in partnering with academic institutions?” (p. 30). They further query the interests, motivations, and perceptions of community partners from their own vantage point and inquire into what is truly valuable in the eyes of the community. They note emerging interest in research and other forms of dialogue, which illuminate greater understanding of both the community, as a whole, and the reality of individual nonprofit community partners.

Cruz and Giles (2000) recognize the challenges in defining community, as well as political issues in identifying who speaks for community organizations, across the community and within organizations. They also identify further stratification and focus required to accurately inquire into the impact of service-learning on community partners. They note that the unit of analysis must be the community-based organization and its perspective of issues, rather than a broad sweep of a generalized and homogeneous community. Individual nonprofit community organizations, agencies, or groups are defined as service-learning partners, but are often generalized as *the community*, negating their individual characteristics and mission. This oversight implies little understanding of the diversity of such organizations and the unique means required to collaborate with each organization, individually. Leiderman et al. (2003), Sandy and Holland (2006), and Worrall (2007) acknowledge this understanding in framing their more recent inquiry from the critical perspective of community partners.

Historically, universities and colleges have been the primary decision-makers in service-learning relationships, but students and community partners are gaining visibility in defining issues and setting the agenda. Ostrander (2004) describes greater involvement by faculty and students, in issues and questions framed in consultation and true partnership with community groups. Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2000) stress, “Without community partners there would be no service-learning” (p. 768). They further reinforce the need for administrators, faculty, and other practitioners to pay closer attention to the desires, assets, culture, composition, evolution, and motivation of community partners.

#### *Comparative Views of Volunteerism and Service Learning*

The perspective from which we view issues impacts our ability to make meaning from any given situation. Service-learning and volunteerism have been studied from different vantage points. This has produced polarized interpretations of issues related to service-learning and volunteer involvement. Both topics, while not new, have only been formally studied in recent decades and defined by academics and practitioners from the lenses of their own disciplines and interests (Graff, 2006; Meinard, 2006).

Much of the service-learning literature generated from an academic perspective, differentiates volunteering from service-learning. It focuses on differences in reflexive learning and fundamental values. Some service-learning scholars describe volunteerism as not involving justice, intentional learning, reflection, or reciprocity (Jacoby et al., 1996). Contemporary research related to volunteerism questions this position and has suggested that thoughtful volunteer involvement includes many of the same elements as service-learning (Graff, 2006; Ilsley, 1990). Consequently, service-learning may not be as unique as some scholars have suggested.

Mundel and Schugurensky (2005) note the informal learning generated in volunteer roles often exceeds the volume of informal learning documented in paid work places. At the same time, they recognize the need for collective and critical reflection in creating learning. Meaningful and effective volunteer engagement relies on understanding volunteer motivation, which often involves learning as a critical motivating factor (Ilsley, 1990; Meinard, 2006; Meneghetti, 1995).

Counter to the notion of Jacoby (2003) and Jacoby et al. (1996), mutual benefits and reciprocity are widely seen as the primary foundation for sustainable volunteer relationships (Graff, 2006; Hall, Lasby, Gunulka, & Tryon, 2000; Ilsley, 1990; Lashby, 2004; Meinard, 2006; Meneghetti, 1995). Contemporary notions of volunteer engagement often include social justice, activism, self-help, and community mobilization as aspects of volunteer involvement (Hall et al., 2000).

Graff (2006) notes the importance of accurate language in describing values, purpose, and outcomes of various forms of community service. She posits that forms of mandated community service confuse issues and involvement, from those sanctioned by the criminal justice system as penance and rehabilitation to those supported by social welfare policy mandating involvement in exchange for core living support. They must be accurately named and understood, thus reducing their connection to volunteerism. Community service-learning, while generally interpreted by academia as voluntary, often impacts community organizations differently, when perceived as mandatory by students and some educational systems alike. While this perception is more prevalent in primary and secondary education than in higher education, attitudes are shaped over a lifetime of experiences. Furthermore, some perceptions of student community service leading to

financial reward, academic advancement, and career gains, by implication, shift service-learning and student volunteerism into the realm of mandated community service.

Graff (2006) suggests that all forms of mandated community service have the potential to both encourage and discourage longer term volunteer engagement, a critical factor in human resources and social capital development in nonprofit organizations. She further notes that little is known about the actual costs and benefits associated with mandated community service and the need for greater consultation with nonprofit organizations. She expresses concern about the impact of mandated community-service initiatives, real or perceived, that fail to consider their costs to community partners. She suggests that those knowledgeable about the impact of mandated community service on volunteer management systems, organizational resources, and volunteer participation be actively consulted and involved, when any form of community-service is considered by an external system or potential partner.

Some scholars challenge both community and campuses to harness the significant potential of volunteerism in support of justice and social change (Marullo & Edwards, 2000; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000). They compare and contrast how such values shape relationships and, consequently, transformation or status quo outcomes. At the same time, they posit differences in philosophical ideology related to charity and justice, which they believe shapes both approaches to solving systemic challenges in society. They further question campus use of a charity model, in how interaction with community-based organizations often transpires.

The perspective of volunteerism as exclusively charity and service-learning as aligned with social justice creates some interesting stereotypes. Jacoby (2003) and Jacoby

et al. (19996) posit that service-learning is more respectful of those served than volunteerism, in that its reciprocity assumes a two-way exchange of service and learning. They profess that volunteering is a paternal and charitable act that assumes a power relationship, in which those served are less capable. Modern views, of the diversity of volunteers and volunteer roles in which citizens engage, would differ in their conclusion (Graff, 2006; Hall et al., 2000; Ilsley, 1990; Lashby, 2004; Meinard, 2006; Meneghetti, 1995).

Marullo and Edwards (2000) further posit that volunteerism is often seen as a moral, rather than political activity, if practiced from a charitable model stance. They suggest, “Volunteers in charitable operation do not seek to alter stratification systems that produce inequality, only temporarily reallocate surplus assets they control” (p. 900). They state no disrespect to charitable efforts, but a need to move towards justice, by focusing such efforts on longer-term organizational, community, and societal change. At the same time, linking politicization and volunteerism, through reflective activity such as defined in service-learning, creates volunteers interested in acting as active agents in social change. They challenge both service-learning practitioners and others involved in volunteerism and other forms of community engagement to examine how values frame the scope and way in which service is practiced.

This tension, between the perspectives of academics and those of organizations that engage and sustain voluntary support daily, foreshadows possible challenges in connecting shared values, meaningful definitions, and mutual outcomes. A primary focus of this inquiry relates to capacity retention and development in nonprofit organizations. From the perspective of nonprofit partners, unless service-learning has unique value

beyond other forms of volunteer and community service, nonprofit partners are not likely to support and develop service-learning partnerships beyond short-term, transactional efforts, if at all.

*Emerging Views of Service-Learning*

Paradoxically, the same charitable model, criticized by some supporters of service-learning, is often replicated in the treatment of nonprofit community partners engaged in service-learning. Enos and Morton (2003) suggest,

Members of a community have a right, as members, to make claims on their goods and services and expect reciprocity or sharing of resources and control over their own destiny. . . . the neighbors of colleges and universities are asking for justice and are receiving charity. (p. 23)

Enos and Morton further observe that the higher education institutional perspective, in many service-learning relationships, is that the community generates problems and needs, and the college or university develops solutions and knowledge. They also discuss university involvement in community-engagement as inconsistent, with goals and approaches defined largely by the institution or student. Emerging views of service-learning relationships are more likely to stress authentic and sustained partnerships, in which “the partners face the continuing possibility of being transformed through their relationship with one another” (p. 20). This evolution in philosophy promotes the goal of transformational change and learning among all partners, and reduces the emphasis on transactional activities, which encourage only status quo, short-term gain, and one-way exchanges.

These diverse understandings of the nature of community influence many of the relationship discussions about service-learning. Most traditional views of service-learning and university–community partnerships define the community as a partner or separate

entity, rather than as the overarching context, in which all service-learning partners exist.

“Service-learning is fundamentally about relationships, however even the terms community and campus used separately create a dichotomy that suggests isolation”

(Jacoby, 2003, p. 31). Emerging views of community imply shared constituency by all campus–community players and service-learning partners.

From the community perspective, campus and community are one domain and this shared identity gives the community a right to influence the allocation of higher education’s goods and resources, particularly those that affect their quality of life. Institutions must not enjoy the community’s resources while holding back on their own. (Enos & Morton, 2003, p. 23)

The views of Winter, Wiseman, and Muirhead (2002) illustrate a widespread support for greater equity in campus–community collaborative initiatives of all kinds.

“Effective community engagement requires deliberate, considered and mutually determined collaborations between communities, government, scholars, students and administration. It cannot occur without democratic principles of participation, consultation and accountability” (p. 3). These values, sometimes not held in earlier campus–community learning initiatives, are moving to the dominant position. The challenge still lies in how to move these values into action.

Mainstream assumptions and values related to power and voice in service-learning will no longer go unchallenged. Butin (2005) questions,

Service-learning appears ideally situated to make an impact in the classroom and in the world. Combining theory with practice, classrooms with communities, the cognitive with the affective, service-learning seemingly breaches the bifurcation of lofty academics with the lived reality of everyday life. Service-learning speaks to our sense of duty and justice in the world: those who can supporting those who cannot, giving opportunities to those left behind. And yet. Such narratives must also be examined for their more troubling assumptions and implications: Who defines such narratives? In what terms? To what ends? For whose benefits? With what (unintended)

consequences? This is a fundamental grappling with the very heart and soul of service-learning. (p. vii)

Each of these emerging issues provides opportunity to think more critically about the presiding body of literature, its evolution, fundamental assumptions and political influences. At the same time, these issues provoke questions about the differences between a Canadian emerging model of community-service learning, the predominant American model, and those of other countries (Hayes & King, 2006). This literature also situates community-engaged and service-learning in evolving and diverse views of campus–community partnerships and higher education community engagement.

#### Partnership and Collaboration in Community-Engaged Learning

A review of the literature, related to the relationship between institutions of higher learning and community-based nonprofit organizations, converges in significant work related to partnership and collaboration. To fully contextualize the individual, organizational, and sectoral issues within this topic, it is important to examine the foundations of collaborative relationships. Building on those principles, the literature is rich with learning about the concepts of community–university partnerships. These relationships are sometimes called campus–community partnerships to be inclusive of both colleges and universities. Within the realm of campus–community collaboration inquiry lays the notion of community-engaged learning initiatives. These ventures join college and university campus constituents with the community, often more accurately defined as community-based organizations. Voluntary, nonprofit sector organizations are the primary subset of community-based organizations. Factors surrounding the perspectives of voluntary, nonprofit sector organizations and the impact of their partnerships are the focus of the inquiry.

*Elements of Partnership and Collaboration*

Partnerships are intentional, mutual cooperation between entities having common interests, privileges, responsibilities, and power. Successful partnerships link individuals and organizations through shared values, skills, knowledge, goals and resources so that they can accomplish more collectively than they could individually (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992).

Collaboration and partnership are widely studied approaches to human endeavour. The related literature, no matter whether it relates to individuals, groups, organizations, or larger units of study, notes some relatively universal themes. These include the purposes, evolution, variables, success factors, challenges, power dynamics, reciprocity, and sustainability issues that influence the effectiveness of such relationships (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992).

Ramaley (2000) defines the ideal campus–community partnership as combining the assets and interests of the community with the academic strength and goals of higher education. She notes the inability of campus–community partnerships to play any transformational role in complex issues unless they are willing and able to sustain long-term commitment. This commitment must connect to both scholarly goals, as well as other outcomes required by both the university and community in sustaining support and interest. Jacoby (2003) notes, “Multisector partnerships, especially those that transform the partners in ways which increase their capacity to bring their resources to bear on mutually defined problems, have far more potential to address problems at higher levels and in more comprehensive ways” (p. 12).

Other viewpoints question if partnerships can exist without authentic power equity as is sometimes lacking when community-campus relationships are realistically considered. Varying degrees of cooperation and collaboration are seen to more accurately describe the shared activity than the term partnership. (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Torres, 2000)

*Evolution and Institutionalization of Campus-Community Partnerships*

The number of working relationships forged between campuses and communities has increased significantly in the past four decades, particularly in the United States. (Jacoby, 2003). This development has been influenced by the growing need for institutions of higher learning to engage more fully with the communities and environment within which they exist, to attain their mission (Ostrander, 2004). The growth in campus–community partnerships has escalated in response to a general belief by leaders in education and elected officials, that preparation of young people for active citizenship is declining and that the education system needs to be part of the solution (Jacoby et al., 1996). Many kinds of collaborative endeavour fall within the literature related to campus–community partnership. Some relate directly to the scholarship and espoused purposes of universities, while other dialogue speaks to the changing role of community colleges and the emerging challenges related to shifts in their identity, as they incorporate alternate or additional goals from their original mandate. Other factor contributing to the expansion of campus engagement with communities includes grounding academic knowledge in real world conditions, connecting knowledge to practice, bringing academics and practitioners together for mutual gain, improving

conditions in local communities through shared action, and building democracy and civil society (Ostrander).

*Complexity, Relationships and Partnership Synergy*

Systems thinking approaches to partnership and collaboration produce rich opportunities to view relationships. Westley, Zimmerman, and Quinn Patton (2006) explore the nature of complexity with respect to many of society's current social challenges. They posit that there are no simple strategies based on specific, isolated elements, and that it is through understanding of relationships and systems that we initiate real social change. The convergence with and crossing of boundaries provides some of the greatest opportunity in future. These spaces support the potential for transformation, rather than continuing transactional encounters. Seel (2006) describes the boundary-spanning transformation required by the voluntary, nonprofit sector to develop the sustainability required for future existence and growth.

Wheatley (2005) and Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1998) also describe new ways of thinking about complexity and uncertainty in and between organizations. They emphasize the need to focus on the quality of relationships that impact interactions when change cannot be accurately predicted or controlled. This perspective supports the enhanced awareness of and investment in positive collaborative relationships required for effective campus–community collaboration.

Jacoby (2003) describes the shifting nature of partnerships and suggests,

In this spirit, it is essential in any service-learning partnership to leave room for serendipity. Partnerships are dynamic and can never be scripted. . . . They will flow, take unexpected turns and end up in unpredictable places. Like relationships among individuals, partnerships among institutions have the potential to transcend the sum of the parts. (p. 318)

She further describes the importance of openness between systems, in order to create outcomes unachievable in disconnected activity and more valuable than the combination of each partner's assets. Partnership synergy is sometimes used to describe this outcome (Jacoby, 2003). Jacoby notes that partnership synergy is the degree to which the collaborative process combines its participants' skills, knowledge, and perspectives to create something new and of value greater than the sum of the parts (Weiss, Miller-Anderson, & Lasker, 2002). It can be predicted through early assessment of a number of factors. These include leadership, management, partnership efficiency, non-financial resources, partner involvement challenges, and external challenges. Partnership synergy enables partners to think in new and better ways, develop more comprehensive and integrated initiatives, and strengthen relationships with the wider community. Weiss et al. state, "A partnership that has maximized its synergy has realized the full potential of the collaboration" (p. 684).

#### *Coordination and Infrastructure*

Campus–community partnerships include multiple stakeholders, each ideally holds both collective and personal goals, which in turn sustain their motivation to contribute to the collaborative initiative. Stakeholders within the university or college realm usually include students, prospective students, faculty, senior leaders, those who steward donors and enable fund development, intermediary staff who support the brokering of relationships between campus and community, and other staff who have a vested interest. In some institutions, the primary responsibility for service-learning partnerships lies within the academic realm, while in others, student affairs or student groups play a large role (Fisher & Huff Wilson, 2003; McHugh Engstrom, 2003).

Herein lays a major theme from the literature; the internal fragmentation of universities and colleges (Enos & Morton, 2003). Large institutions with loosely-coupled components, whether they are faculties, programs, services, or communications entities, become problematic for community organizations to engage with. Their complexity becomes a barrier to any kind of continuity (Jacoby, 2003). In loosely-coupled organizations, units operate in a relatively autonomous state, not dependent upon other units for success. While such organizations have the advantage of being highly adaptable, they may be unaware of their impact on other internal entities or external stakeholders. They may also be unaware of emerging opportunity, if communication is not effective. Such may be the case in recognizing the impact and lost potential of some campus–community collaborations. Some programs sustain highly effective community partnerships, which yield widespread benefits for both the campus and community. At the same time, other programs, faculties, or administrative units do not consider their connectivity and, in fact, jeopardize that of others. The continued existence of functional and discipline silos in both campuses and community organizations threaten the full potential of collaboration, reducing partnership synergy within partnering organizations and eventually between campus–community partners. Jacoby notes the critical nature of organizational literacy: the capacity to understand and communicate how one’s organization works, how to connect entities, how to solicit resources, and how to identify where leadership and support lie. She recognizes the differences in organizational culture in and between campus–community domains and the need to translate and bridge the cultural differences effectively.

At the same time, community-based organizations also vary in size, complexity, and role differentiation (Hall et al., 2005). In most organizations, service-learning falls within the context of volunteer engagement, while in others it may be coordinated through human resources areas or by frontline program delivery staff (Graff, 2006). In other situations, Boards in their governance role and Executive Directors through their senior management roles play a large part in the success of service-learning partnerships. While nonprofit, community-based organizations can vary dramatically in size, they tend to be flatter organizations, with fewer organizational units to coordinate than institutions of higher learning.

The distinct and often fragmented nature of disciplinary specialization within colleges and universities is not well suited to solving complex problems in partnership. Many complex community challenges, including issues such as poverty, require holistic understanding and a willingness to blur boundaries to successfully explore solutions collaboratively. This fragmentation can be reduced through identification of shared values and goals, effective leadership, and policies and infrastructure that consider unified goals.

#### *The Changing Role of Scholarship in Community Engagement*

The nature of scholarship and defined expertise shapes the collaborative relationship. Boyer (1990) describes the scholarship of discovery, or the research agenda, that primarily contributes to the knowledge base in a researcher's discipline. At the same time, he notes the relationship between the reward system of the academy, including funding, tenure, and promotion, often based on pure rather than applied research. The deliverables from such projects, while useful in many domains, do not always produce

applied or accessible knowledge for community partners. Boyer advocates for balance between discovery and application aligned with the information needs of a wider community. Marullo and Edwards (2000) further discuss Boyer's scholarship of engagement, which connects discovery, pedagogy, integration, and application. They posit that research, the scholarship of discovery, has overshadowed the other three, to the detriment of community engagement. They suggest that scholarship of engagement will only flourish when reward systems and recognition for the other three elements match those of research.

At the same time, some believe academic neutrality is easily maintained through disconnection with the daily and political issues implicit in community-based organizations. Enos and Morton (2003) challenge, "Expertise is easier to maintain when it is not challenged by application. . . . Too often higher education faculty and students reserve for themselves the authority to name an experience and determine what is or is not meaningful" (p. 35). The shared identification and exploration of issues is seen to be a primary characteristic of effective and sustained partnership.

#### *Assessment in Campus-Community Partnerships*

Assessment plays a critical role in the development and longevity of campus–community partnerships. Effective campus–community partnership assessment approaches include attention to process and outcome. At the same time, assessment must include a full range of perspectives, from those of students and faculty, to community organizations, funders, and other stakeholders (Gelmon, 2003). Gass (2005) describes the multiple stakeholders in both assessment and other forms of inquiry. Each stakeholder brings a perspective that shapes the data generated, because of their diverse experiences

and values. They construct their own meaning about the value of the results, and this in turn influences how or if they apply the related knowledge. Traditionally, impact on student learning has been the primary research theme in the literature, but in the past decade other outcomes and methods have been studied. Greater attention to the viewpoints of community partners has arisen (Gelmon). Cruz and Giles (2000) describe several approaches that consider the view point of community-based partners. These approaches include using participatory action research, consulting with community organizations in identifying and shaping the inquiry, sharing the results through collaborative application and taking an appreciative or assets-based approach where possible, rather than focusing on needs and deficits.

Holland (2001) has also developed a comprehensive assessment tool that captures the perspectives of all partners and considers the impact of processes and outcomes on each player. Corporate social responsibility and engagement history provides some learning, which might be considered in campus–community partnerships. Maurrasse (2002) examines this learning. He compares the progress of higher education-community partnerships over time and considers how stages of development influence the style and timing of assessment. He emphasizes the need for monitoring process more heavily initially and the patience required to see return on investment.

Gelmon (2003) suggests that consideration to assessment challenges should include what barriers and utility they present to all partners. Issues include the type and format of research required, the potential lack of resources by some partners, the demands placed on day-to-day operations, the usefulness of the assessment to participating partners, and the accessibility of resulting information.

*Mutuality, Reciprocity and Power*

Vickers et al. (2004) highlight the interdependence and reciprocity required for sustained partnerships in service learning. Shared interests and goals, mutual benefits, equitable relationships, and respect for each other's assets all contribute to mutuality. They further recognize the value of reciprocal benefits in motivating nonprofit, community partners to expend resources for supervision, planning, administration, and evaluation of such initiatives. This is particularly important when linking early success in transactional exchange, which in turn may set the stage for trust and development of more transformational outcomes.

Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2000) articulate a significant issue that reduces the likelihood of mutuality and reciprocity. This is the perspective (espoused or not) of universities and colleges as seeing themselves as solutions to a community needs, rather than partners in identifying common and complementary challenges and assets in pursuit of transformational action. A paternal position that sees the community as needy and the campus as a provider of resources does not conform to modern understanding of campus and community. Ward and Wolf-Wendel further state, "Service learning is not done for someone who needs the help of a college student or professor; service is done with peers in the community, and from that service, new understanding and learning arises for all involved" (p. 777). The relationship has moved to that of colleague not client. Ward and Wolf-Wendel describe this phenomenon as moving from doing for to doing with.

Gelmon (2003) suggests that as a result of higher education seeing itself as the expert, accountability in service-learning, together with what defines success, is all too often stated in terms of students and institutions. She believes accountability should be a

topic of broader public dialogue, including accountability for telling the story from the community's perspective. Gelmon further suggests a dialogic process that includes ongoing assessment of the community or organization's assets, needs, and potential benefits is a critical component of effective partnership. She posits that accountability in the academy does not often consider the tangible and local impact of its work. The neutrality of many research approaches further supports this premise.

Partners in campus–community collaborations perceive greater value from relationships in which they are actively engaged through involvement, commitment, and a sense of ownership (El Ansari & Phillips, 2004). Commitment and a sense of ownership may be more accurate indicators of involvement than costs incurred or the satisfaction expressed by partners. In cost-benefit ratios, partners require there to be 60% more benefits than costs to be favourable. Benefits include factors such as building organizational capacity, developing social capital, and achieving mission. Costs include wasting skill and time, partnership activities that do not achieve stated goals, and resources allocated to partnership that could be spent on other goals (El Ansari & Phillips). Shefner and Cobb (2002) posit that no matter how much goodwill exists within partnerships, power inequity determines what priorities are set and ultimately what outcomes emerge. Partners with greater power and prestige likely dominate other players, unless hierarchy and decision-making are openly acknowledged and dealt with. Exploration of this dynamic is equally important in modeling the democratic principles upon which service-learning is grounded. Torres (2001) recognizes the differential in access to various social systems by each partner and notes, “Collaboration among diverse parties holds the potential to transform the system that perpetuates inequality” (p. 16).

Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2000) advise,

Consider the position, history and power (or powerlessness) of all involved in the service relationship. Involvement in community service is about giving and receiving. Students and faculty in service learning need to be cognizant of their power and position in society and in service relationships. (p. 775)

*Transactional and Transformational Partnership*

Enos and Morton (2003) posit that partnerships have the potential not to just complete immediate goals, but to transform individuals, organizations, institutions, and communities. “In authentic partnerships, the complex dynamics of the relationship mean that the partners face the continuing possibility of being transformed through their relationship with one and other in large and small ways” (p. 20). They note that most relationships begin through transactional, exchange-based activity designed to fulfill short-term goals. The initial commitment is focused on meeting each partner's expectations through management within existing systems and distinct identities. As the relationship matures, there is the possibility of creating longer term, transformational change, through increased aspirations by both parties. This includes a desire to look at issues more broadly, transcendence of self-interest, dynamic collaborative leadership, and combined and accessible infrastructure and resources. The critical growth in the depth and meaning of the partnership is dependant upon values, attitudes, and larger shared goals. In such “dynamic, joint creations, . . . all people involved create knowledge, transact power, mix personal and institutional interests and make meaning” (p. 25).

The development of campus–community partnerships, related to student involvement, vary in duration, depth, complexity, and commitment. Enos and Morton (2003) describe five levels of involvement, sometimes incremental, which influence both investment and outcomes. These are one-time events and projects, short-term placements,

ongoing placements that involve mutual dependence, core partnerships based on interdependence, and finally, transformation through joint creation of work and knowledge. Each carries with it both strengths and challenges to the partners, individually and collectively.

### *Success Factors in Campus–Community Partnerships*

Greenberg, Howard, and Desmond (2003) and Torres (2000) acknowledge factors key to authentic campus–community partnerships. These include partnerships that are: (a) intentionally built on shared vision and values that benefit partnering organizations, (b) guided by strong and dynamic leaders, (c) demonstrate trust and respect between individuals, and (d) those that see issues as complex and multidimensional, requiring holistic approaches. To sustain these partnerships, over time organizations must integrate the essence of the collaborative activities into their mission and infrastructure, develop a partnering process for communication, decision-making, and initiating change. Ward and Wolf-Wendell (2000) suggest blurring of boundaries between campus and community. This notion is congruent with that of boundary spanning (Sandy & Holland, 2006; Seel, 2006). There is a need for more fluid and collaborative activity in both the classroom and community through co-facilitation and sharing of assets.

Other principles also influence effective service-learning. They include shared credit for outcomes and responsibility for challenges. Feedback and reflection play a role in maximizing the outcomes of mutual work and that partnership norms are mutually determined. Clear and inclusive communication, shared power and resource allocation, acknowledgement of strengths and shared commitment to improvement, mutual trust and respect, and agreed upon goals and measurable outcomes are important factors (Weiss et

al., 2002). Ward and Wolf-Wendell (2000) promote the addition of community service to the portfolio of faculty, and to reward and respect it, as valued work, which contributes to the mission of institutions of higher learning. Ramaley (2000) notes factors that support the sustainability of service-learning partnerships over time. These include clear criteria from universities and colleges about their academic strengths and philosophy, as well as the community's definition of its own boundaries with respect to shared activity, for example client privacy and welfare. She also warns that partnerships cannot be sustained without infusions of new and additional support and ideas over time. Early enthusiasm for partnerships can sometimes blind partners and underestimate the requirements of long-term successes. Ostrander (2004) warns against prescribed success factors and stresses the need for dynamic and developmental frameworks in campus civic engagement. The priorities and assets of each partner, as well as external forces, are never static, and consequently, success cannot be measured with single models or universal best practices.

Relationships succeed because of individuals. How can organizations institutionalize the tacit knowledge and organizational values, which sustain the relationship when champions leave? Bringle and Hatcher (2002) examine the psychological theories about friendships and romantic relationships for similarities in how organizational partnerships are developed and sustained. They posit that diverse and complex relationships among stakeholders in campus–community partnerships often struggle with maintaining their own identities while developing a new collective identity. Jacoby (2003) suggests that infrastructure, including appropriate governance, is critical to

entrenching and sustaining endeavours started through individual relationships, but notes that the individuals involved are the critical element not the structures and process.

Armistead, Pettigrew, and Aves (2007) warn that multi-sectoral partnerships often consume the capacity of individual partners in aid of building the collaborative. Further to this consumption of resources, the focus of the individual partner may be lost to mission drift, as they are drawn into the wider peripheral issues. This dilution may become more problematic when extensive inclusivity of all possible collaborators becomes inefficient from a practical perspective.

Partnerships balance risk and benefit. Some are seen as low level. These provide short-term, transactional assistance, but do not impact systemic or larger capacity issues. Others are deemed low benefit while generating high-risk and are usually avoided, as they consume capacity without generating any gain for partners. Mid-range projects balance beneficial outcomes with moderate risks and deepen focused investment in systemic or larger issues. Finally, other collaborative relationships are seen as potentially highly beneficial, so worth the risk management and investment required (Enos & Morton, 2003). The level of trust between partners, that is the mutual understanding and respect for each other's interests and belief in the sustainability of the relationship, impacts the willingness of risk taking and also generates future trust (Enos & Morton).

Sustainability plays a key role in partnership success. Alexander et al. (2003) note that, by not realizing systemic change related to longer-term goals, sustainability is threatened, as organizations are less likely to repeat their involvement. Unsustained partnerships leave a legacy of negativity that inhibits future voluntary efforts. Trust is required to cement relationships of loosely-bound partners who are not committed

through other formal mechanisms. Partners work with the duality of responsibility to their own organization and to the collective effort. This causes tension over the long-term, making partnership stability more vulnerable. When mutuality and reciprocity wane, so too does the collaboration (Alexander et al.).

Many themes underscore effective campus–community collaborations that provide beneficial outcomes for individuals, organizations, sectors, and communities. As they mature as a combined route to effective learning and community service, many opportunities for enriching understanding and amending approaches exist. It is through reflexive practice and commitment to ongoing improvement that community engagement by universities and colleges, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders can excel.

#### Capacity and Community-Based Nonprofit Organizations

Organizational and community capacity influence an organization’s ability to collaborate with others and to contribute to their own development, as well as that of the collaboration and community (Kibbe et al., 2004). At the same time, equity, power, and other relational issues influence the likelihood of organizational capacity growing or being depleted through collective activities and partnerships. The literature related to organizational and community capacity building provides context for examining how campus–community collaboration and service-learning student involvement enhances or consumes capacity in community-based nonprofit organizations.

Organizational capacity is defined as the ability of an organization to achieve its mission, which is often social in community organizations (Bartczak, 2005; Blumenthal, 2003; Hall et al., 2003; Kibbe et al., 2004). Canada’s nonprofit, voluntary sector plays a

critical role in service delivery and is seen to be the most effective place for generating social capital (Hall et al., 2003; Goldenberg, 2006). They describe the tenuous current state of capacity in Canada's voluntary, nonprofit sector. They further emphasize that an organization's ability to create outcomes depends upon both the organization's capacity and external issues or forces.

### *Components of Nonprofit Organization Capacity*

Framing an inquiry into value generation to nonprofit community partners requires an understanding of what elements constitute capacity in an organization. Organizational capacity is seen to focus on three areas that allow groups to achieve their mission and goals. These are human resource capacity, financial capacity, and structural capacity. Structural capacity includes relational and network capacity, planning and development capacity, and infrastructure and process capacity (Hall et al., 2003). They define nonprofit, voluntary sector human resources capacity as the ability to deploy human capital including volunteers and paid staff in support of organizational and community goals. The competencies, skills, motivations, attitudes, behaviours, and knowledge of individuals and groups are paramount to achieving in all other capacity areas. They further posit that financial capacity relates to the development and deployment of financial resources. Structural capacity includes the remaining infrastructure, relationships, and processes of the organization. These include relational and network capacity and the ability to form and draw on relationships with members, clients, funders, partners, donors, volunteers, regulators, and other stakeholders. Planning and development capacity ranges from policy development through to planning processes that frame the organization's work. Finally, infrastructure and process capacity provides

for operational resources that include facilities, intellectual property, and other products required to deliver service (Hall et al., 2003). Kibbe et al. (2004) offer a similar four-part model that defines capacity as related to management, leadership, resource development, and technical capabilities. McKinsey and Co. (2001) expands capacity assessment to include aspirations, strategy, organizational skills, human resources, systems and infrastructure, organizational structure and culture. Bartczak (2005) notes that, while many tools have been adapted from McKinsey and Co.'s work, capacity assessment continues to focus on higher level capacity issues including leadership, vision, and mission.

Further to these views of nonprofit organization capacity, the notion of adaptive capacity, the ability to anticipate the need for change and operate with flexibility, has gained meaning. Drawing from systems and scientific study, adaptive capacity refers to the capacity of a system to adapt if the environment where the system exists is changing (Wheatley, 2005). Such is the evolutionary context of the community and the campuses and nonprofit organizations within it. Resilience and sustainability are seen to be outcomes of adaptive capacity.

#### *External Influences on Organizational Capacity*

Hall et al. (2003) note that several kinds of external forces influence the effectiveness of organizations in concert with capacity issues. These constraints and facilitators include public policy, the political environment, the economy, prevailing societal values, legal and regulatory issues, societal needs, demographics, competition within and between the public, private and voluntary sectors, and public trust in nonprofit organizations. Following from these influences is access to resources by nonprofit

organizations, which are largely impacted by external environmental issues. Finally, the sectoral and organizational history including values, past behaviours, relationships, stereotypes, and overall ethos frame current and future performance issues.

### *Collaboration as Capacity Building*

Floyd (2007) suggests that the collaborative relationship may garner capacity building through the participation of partners in various forms of collective activity, including communicating, contributing, coordinating, cooperating, and collaborating, depending upon the level of trust and commitment present. She notes that capacity building results from acts such as lending capacity, experiential learning, modeling, securing training, and peer support. Lending capacity results when a partner with more or different capacity shares it situationally. Involvement in collaborative activity can also generate experiential learning benefits, thus, contributing to capacity development for all partners. She further reinforces that it takes capacity to generate capacity, especially when working with others. Participants must have the attitudes, skills, values, and goals to effectively contribute to and benefit from the relationship. At the same time, infrastructure and technical capacity is required to integrate and sustain the relationship and its outcomes. Gronski and Pigg (2000) confirm the importance of these capacities and the value of service and community-engaged learning in teaching students and faculty about collaboration—an increasingly important primary skill in human and community service. Baum (2000) notes, “A partnership may establish an enduring relationship that may create various programs, but also builds connections or social capital” (p. 236).

*Social and Network Capital as Capacity*

Edwards and Foley (1998) and Putnam (2000) describe the demise of civic engagement in America. Putnam believes social capital is generated by and critical for citizen engagement. Social capital involves connections within and between social networks. Edwards and Foley posit that social and other forms of isolation make social capital unavailable to many, creating inequality. All forms of social capital are not equally valued, and the perceived worth of the source of the capital generation may be relative. Socio-economic factors and privilege are often influences.

Putnam (2000) further describes social capital as bonding: that which reinforces homogeneous group identity with inward focus and bridging capital generated when links are built through connections and diversity (pp. 22–24). Bridging capital is generated through social engagement, the opportunity for people to work together across organizations, sectors, and in other crosscutting ways. It can be formed through collaborative approaches and perspective, such as those utilized in campus–community initiatives. Foster, Meinard, and Berger (2003) describe bridging as connecting networks or individuals who may not otherwise be linked. Bridging requires weaker links or ties, as a less restrictive relationship is required. At the same time, bonding is based on more closely-tied, dense networks that exist over longer duration. Reciprocity may be more important in bridging situations, as collaboration is more instrumentally based and dependent on the perceived value of the resulting benefits (Foster et al.).

*Issues in Capacity Building*

The concept of capacity-building is a common focus in the voluntary, nonprofit sector. Approaches to capacity-building include both capacity generated within nonprofit

organizations and those seen as interventions by external entities, such as funders or parent organizations. With greater focus on nonprofit organizations as key resources in communities, investment in developing and sustaining organizational capacity is growing (Goldenberg, 2006).

Hall et al. (2003) note that nonprofit organizations and the partnerships they engage in require capacity to generate many outputs. These outputs may add value in the short term; however, the eventual long-term goal must be to achieve outcomes that link directly to mission. This is important when examining both the immediate and potential satisfaction of each partner in service-learning and campus–community partnership. A partner’s ability to postpone the rewards of the relationship may be directly affected by the partner’s existing capacity. External stakeholders, who evaluate organizational effectiveness in order to sustain some aspects of future capacity, are generally focused on outcomes. This notion relates to the differing perspectives on short-term and long-term investments by partners involved in service-learning.

Kidd (2005) and Kibbe et al. (2004) question the definition of organizational effectiveness and capacity developed by external forces, particularly when equating efficiency and effectiveness on their own terms. They further note that capacity is not the same as effectiveness, and that effectiveness is a relative term. Who defines effectiveness? Which constituents and stakeholders should be involved in setting and evaluating expectations? They query the organization that establishes overly modest goals or one that consumes too much in the process or insufficiently leverages its assets. Capacity is not an end. It is a means. Kibbe et al. suggest that mission drift may occur when capacity building is defined externally and states “Capacities that enhance

effectiveness (results) are capacities that are aligned with and in service of mission and goals” (p. 3). Capacity is a dynamic concept that requires constant reflection and nourishment.

### Summary and Relationship to Inquiry

The literature related to service-learning, campus–community partnerships and capacity in nonprofit organizations provides a context for the study of factors that contribute value to community organizations, involved in collaborative activity, through student involvement. The continuing service-learning dialogue illustrates the evolving understanding of many forms of community-engaged learning and their value to all stakeholders in the relationship. Of particular significance is the absence of voice of community-based nonprofit partners and their perspectives in such relationships. This observation supports the need for further inquiry into this realm. The extensive examination of campus–community collaboration in the literature provides insight into the role of power, equity, and justice in authentic partnerships. At the same time, this exploration debates the factors that contribute to effective partnerships and the need for dynamic views of the evolving nature of relationship development. Finally, the concepts of organizational capacity, its components, and how it is generated and consumed, provide insight into related elements and models of value to the inquiry. These provide a framework with which to examine partnership influences on nonprofit organizational capacity. The following chapter examines the methodology used in the research inquiry.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

### Action Research Approach

Focusing on qualitative research, I chose a community-based action research approach to my inquiry regarding how student placements, in community-engaged learning collaborations, can enhance value and capacity for nonprofit organizations involved as community partners.

My inquiry used qualitative approaches, which are more suited to the depth, uniqueness, and personal perspectives of participants in contributing to the research. My intention was to be as inclusive as possible, insuring that the perspectives of community-based nonprofit organizations shaped the research. Glesne (2006) notes, “Practitioners who couple basic research theories and techniques with an action mode can develop collaborative, reflective data gathering and analysis teams for their own practices and therefore contribute to the socio-political context in which they dwell” (p. 18). My intent was to support community-building while involving the research participants in identifying issues and practices which would enhance or sustain effective experiential learning partnerships.

Berg (2007) defines participatory action research as

collective self enquiry undertaken by participants in social relationship with one another in order to improve some condition or situation with which they are involved. Thus it is a very collaborative, reflective, experiential and participatory mode of research in which all individuals involved in the study, researcher and subjects alike, are deliberate and contributing actors in the research enterprise. (p. 223)

Action research is grounded in the social value of collaboration that assumes both the researcher and the participants are co-creators of knowledge. Stringer (1999) notes that both professionals and lay people play an important role in action research, as

stakeholders with potential to improve the quality of their community life. He further describes action research:

A fundamental premise of community-based action research is that it commences with an interest in the problems of a group, a community or an organization. Its purpose is to assist people in extending their understanding of their situation and thus in resolving problems that confront them. (pp. 9–10)

This approach is congruent with the collaborative nature of the learning partnerships being studied, the nonprofit sector, and the sponsoring organization, the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (ECVO). Community-engaged learning is designed to promote active and involved citizenship, which is parallel to the democratic principles espoused by Stringer (1999). He describes action research as democratic, equitable, liberating, and life enhancing. These traits assume supporting full participation by all stakeholders, valuing the worth of all related experiences, and providing an opportunity for dialogue that encourages inquiry into themes that have been less explored. Berg (2007) states, “It is meant to enlighten and empower the average person in the group, motivating them to take up and use the information gathered in the research” (p. 224). My inquiry was designed to give nonprofit organizations greater voice in telling their stories about the impact of community-engaged learning partnerships, with the intent of influencing practice by colleges, universities, funders, students and nonprofit organizations.

Equally important is the focus on change generated by action research. Enhancing value to organizations in community-engaged learning partnerships implies a learning and change process, which action research honours.

Action research generally involves four phases: focusing the inquiry, data collection, analysis, and action. Berg (2007) describes a “spiralling of steps, each of

which is composed of some type of planning, action and evaluation” (p. 223). Each phase includes intentional reflection and learning, which influences future action undertaken in the inquiry and framing of the next research cycle.

The action research cycle has been defined as a cyclic process that involves observing, thinking, and then acting (Stringer, 1999). Each action research cycle builds on the learning generated by the last cycle. To maximize learning, individual interviews were followed by a second cycle of data gathering and reflection, involving a group method of dialogue and inquiry.

Action research uses the energy and motivation generated by the process in initiating change. Change requires collective awareness as a catalyst. Qualitative action research supports relationship and community-building and provides exposure to multiple perspectives. Palys (2003) suggests that focus on process is fundamental to qualitative research. Stringer (1999) notes, “Active participation is key to the feeling of ownership that motivates people to invest their time and energy to help shape the nature and quality of their community lives” (p. 38).

Stringer (1999) suggests, “Those that have previously been subjects should participate directly in research processes, and those processes should be applied in ways that benefit all participants directly. Community-based action research is a derivative of this approach to inquiry” (p. 7). This is particularly important in creating equity between universities and colleges, which generally have easy access to research resources, and their nonprofit colleagues, who often do not have this capacity. This is well illustrated by the volume of research literature focused on the perspectives of students and educational institutions, while the voices of nonprofit community organizations are much quieter.

Stringer (1999) supports the value of action research in creating multiple outcomes through process. Action research potentially builds community and shared values impacting the individuals involved socially, emotionally, and politically, as well as intellectually. These are important benefits in raising awareness of issues related to the inquiry and engaging individuals within disparate organizations and systems in a meaningful dialogue. Stringer further suggests,

As practitioners develop programs and services or seek to solve problems that threaten the efficacy of services for which we are responsible, we need to take into account the impacts of those developments or solutions on the lives of the people we serve. (p. 23)

This statement underscores the core theme of the research question. In choosing a qualitative, action research approach, I hoped to better understand how the demands and assets that community-engaged learning brings to nonprofit organizations actually impact the capacity of that organization.

As the researcher, my role has been to focus on both the process and the task of gathering data. Stringer (1999) notes,

In community-based action research the role of the researcher is not that of an expert who *does* research, but that of a resource person. He or she becomes a facilitator or consultant who acts as a catalyst to stakeholders in defining their problems clearly and to support them as they work towards effective solutions to issues that concern them. (p. 25)

### Research Methodology

Use of two data collection methods, involving the same participants, contributed to the trustworthiness and authenticity of the research. Narrative inquiry interviews and a focus group were used to gather the data and as a catalyst for several action research cycles. This approach increased the likelihood that multiple and diverse perspectives related to the inquiry focus were included in identifying issues and commitment to action

(Glesne, 2006). Creswell (as cited in Glesne) also suggests that peer review and debriefing, clarification of researcher bias, checking accuracy with participants, and the depth of data collection, all influence trustworthiness of the inquiry. Each of these approaches was integrated in the research methodology.

Defining the limitations of the data collection and analysis process is also important in recognizing the subjectivity of the inquiry. As the researcher, I hoped to be assisted in these activities, where possible, by a small research team, in addition to the major project sponsor and supervisor. I recognized early on that, while several individuals were interested in participating, demands on their time were too great and the coordination of a blended team effort was unlikely. As a substitute, I did invite several individuals, who had diverse research process and theme content experience to discuss ideas and approaches during the inquiry process. They included three individuals who served in intermediary roles linking community organizations and students for learning purposes. Each represented a different perspective depending upon the institution with which they are associated and the organizational units in which they practice. These individual dialogues informed my thinking and provided me with opportunity to affirm or redevelop aspects of my inquiry. At the same time I conferred with research participants on at least two occasions after the interview process, to check the accuracy of my interpretation: once in the focus group and again as I organized and reviewed the data from each interview. This was important in ensuring that both the process and outcome of data gathering was authentic and congruent with the norms and interests of the community of interest. Ethically and practically, I was very sensitive to the capacity of research participants and peers, particularly as the inquiry focuses on the issue of student

learning in nonprofits. In this case, as the researcher, I am the student involved in an experiential learning process, which may build or drain capacity from the participating community-based nonprofit organizations.

### Inquiry Tools

#### *Unobtrusive Approaches*

The first action research cycle was carried out through use of pre-inquiry personal observations and thoughts, coupled with the first phase of the literature review. These formed an informal body of information for reflection and discussion with the project sponsor, peers and faculty. The resulting discussion shed light on how to focus proposed topics and approaches. Action based on these outcomes informed the second action research cycle, which involved ECVO member organizations.

#### *Interactive Methods*

Eight individual interviews, using a narrative inquiry approach (Berg, 2007), sought depth and individual perspectives not found in other methods. Narrative inquiry methodology was chosen to give nonprofit organization research participants a full range of opportunity to tell their stories, as much of the literature has focused on narrow issues or themes defined by universities and colleges only. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note, “The study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world” (p.1). Bruner (as cited in Conle, 2007) describes narrative as happening at both an individual and social level, and that it is the process through which cultures express their world views and provide models of identity and agency to their members. My intent in this inquiry was to assist research participants in communicating their perspectives and describing the culture in which they operate, so that others involved in community-

engaged learning might share increased awareness of their context and, ultimately, understand their own impact. Clandinin and Connelly also explore the notion that we are always in the midst of living our stories, and narrative provides a vehicle that reflects ongoing experience noting, “Their lives do not begin the day we arrive or end the day we leave. Their lives continue” (p. 64).

The narrative inquiry interviews were audio-recorded, and I took notes as well. While the interview style was conversational, I used a script (see Appendix A) for continuity, to introduce and review the process and key issues. Berg (2007) suggests testing the interview structure for completeness and appropriate sequencing, as well as realistic schedule time frames. The questions and related terminology were reviewed for clarity, as I was concerned about interpretation of the term community-engaged learning. At the same time, I chose to introduce the narrative inquiry method briefly and define the structure of the interview, as it seemed too open-ended for those who initially tested my instructions.

Most interviews and the focus group were held at Grant MacEwan College. Two interviews were conducted within the research participant’s workplaces for their convenience. Participants were offered light refreshments and reimbursement for parking.

Interviews were one hour in length and followed a three-part structure, to frame core interview components. Participants were welcomed and re-oriented to the research theme and the voluntary nature of participation, as well as their rights as a research participant. I reviewed the Letter of Consent (see Appendix B) with each participant, sought any questions or concerns, and asked them to sign the consent form. Secondly, I outlined the structure of the interview and asked several contextual questions about their

organization (see Appendix A). Finally, I asked the participant to tell me about their experiences in hosting college and university student placements related to community-engaged learning. I asked clarifying questions as required. At the end of each session, I paraphrased my understanding of the participant's responses to ensure accuracy. Participants were thanked and reminded of the focus group purpose and date.

The focus group was held one week after the final interview. Initially, an interval of three weeks was planned to compile and review interview data. Two interviews were rescheduled to accommodate emerging needs of research participants; consequently there was a short amount of time for me to review data, prior to planning the focus group. I had also planned to involve the sponsor and another peer during this interval, to consider their reflections regarding the format and emphasis of the focus group. This was not possible, because of the short duration of the break between data gathering sessions. In retrospect, I would choose a longer period between data gathering methods to do a more in-depth analysis of emerging themes, involve others, and reflect on the methods used in the focus group.

The individual interviews informed the direction of the focus group. The focus group questions and activities built on themes identified through the interview process. Berg (2007) states, "Focus group interviews are a useful strategy either stand alone or as a line of action in a triangulated project" (p. 144). He further states that focus groups are more than interviews with a number of individuals assembled as a group. They explicitly use the group interaction as part of the data gathering method. A group data collection process was chosen to engage research participants in a deeper dialogue designed to raise awareness of common issues and perspectives, as well as alternate viewpoints. As the

inquiry focused on a finite geographic area, the Edmonton region, focus group interaction was designed to encourage ongoing discussion and perhaps action related to the study theme.

The focus group participants were drawn from the same group of individuals who had previously been interviewed. All were invited, but two were not able to attend the focus group. I anticipated that research participants might feel more validated in their perspectives after hearing the experiences and opinions of others. The group dialogue experience was helpful in developing participant awareness of multiple perspectives, building relationships, and initiating change related to a wider group representing the community of interest.

The ninety-minute focus group was composed of three activities designed to introduce individuals who may not have previously met, engage participants in dialogue around shared interests, validate emerging themes from individual interviews, and generate some recommendations for enhanced practice. Phase one of the session included a brief introduction of emerging interview themes and a discussion about their accuracy. The second phase involved the six participants forming self-organized pairs to generate summary messages for current and prospective community-engaged learning partners from colleges and universities. At the same time, they discussed what they hoped related nonprofit organizations and funders might consider. The written summary statements were generated from stem statements, which asked what practices the research participants would like the three entities to start, stop, and continue. The stem statements were:

1. What would you most like universities and colleges to do regarding your experiences with community-engaged learning student placements?
2. What would you most like your own organization and other nonprofit organizations to do with respect to community—engaged learning student placements?
3. Are there other stakeholders involved and what would you like them to know?
4. Are there other issues you would like to comment on?

Responses were shared with the large group, and the messages were sorted on related flip charts. The final phase of the focus group involved two self-organized groups of three, in which participants created a real or hypothetical story (narrative) about an ideal scenario in which a multi-organization, community-engaged learning initiative created transformational change. After developing the narratives, each group shared their work, which in turn generated further discussion. The narratives were recorded in writing by participants, and I took notes as well. In retrospect, I would use audio-recording for this facet of the group session, as some detail was not captured. Data collected from the focus group started the third cycle of reflection.

### Participants

Action research is a highly-participatory and inclusive approach to inquiry and should reflect participation from diverse members of the community of interest. This approach encourages multiple perspectives, which increase the authenticity of the inquiry and likelihood of involvement that may be the catalyst for the beginning of a change intervention. Patton (as cited in Glesne, 2006) notes the importance of purposeful sampling in qualitative research. It is important to choose participants with rich stories

and the potential to add depth to the inquiry. He further notes that qualitative researchers rarely work with populations large enough to make random sampling meaningful, and their purpose is not to generalize their findings to a larger population.

Key stakeholders in this inquiry included research participants in several distinct roles in nonprofit organizations. I anticipated that each might have a different perspective on the issue, based on their involvement and experiences. Research participants included Executive Directors, Managers of Volunteers, Board Members, Human Resources Managers and Program Managers. Some research participants had served in several nonprofit organizations and in a number of differing roles in their careers, which brought diverse experiences to the inquiry. Each of these vantage points contributed to the richness of multiple perspectives.

Invitations were distributed by mail to the Executive Directors of forty-four of the forty-six ECVO member agencies (see Appendix C). The membership contact list was provided for research purposes by ECVO. Two member organizations were excluded based on conflict of interest guidelines I had established, as funders or prospective funders of initiatives in which I am involved in. In the research invitation, the invited Executive Directors were asked to also include their organization's manager of volunteers or other program level manager, if the organization employed individuals in these roles. The invitation included an overview of the research and an invitation to voluntarily participate in both narrative inquiry interviews and a focus group (see Appendix C). To build depth in themes resulting from the interviews, the same respondents were asked to participate in both data collection methods.

It was important to do some stratification in research participant selection to ensure multiple perspectives. I initially hoped to recruit research participants from varied sub sectors represented within the ECVO membership, as well as individuals with diverse roles and experiences. The primary criterion for selection was experience as a partner in some form of community-engaged learning. Ultimately, all research participants were drawn from human service organizations, but represented varied sizes of operations and roles within the organizations.

Initially, I received three responses to the letter, all expressing interest in the research, but indicating that their organizations did not host students, as they did not have the capacity to do so. Nine days after the initial invitation was mailed, I emailed the same member organizations using a more abbreviated and informal message, with similar content (see Appendix D). I received six responses that fit the criteria for participation. To ensure adequate experience and diversity in the research participant group, I invited two additional organizations to participate. They were not ECVO members, but had similar characteristics. Eight research participants were involved in the interviews, with a subset of six further participating in the focus group process. Follow-up clarification conversations through phone or email were conducted with all but one participant, who could not be contacted. The data collection sessions were confirmed by email, and a Letter of Consent (see Appendix B) was attached to be reviewed in advance. I restated the research question and theme, giving participants some time to identify experiences and reflect on them, prior to the interview. This was particularly important, due to the open format of narrative. Participation was enthusiastic, with all research participants actively committed to involvement.

Table 1. *Average Organization Budget and Activity Related to U/C Student Placements (Annual)*

Participant	Budget	Employees (Full Time Equivalent)	Number of Student Placements	Volunteers Placed Annually*	Place K-12 Students
A	\$2,800,000	43	5	2000	No
B	\$2,500,000	30	10		No
C	\$3,000,000	65	40	100	
D	\$4,000,000	90	14	2400	minimal
E	\$550,000	8	5		
F	\$750,000	10	5	150	No
G	\$1,000,000	35	40	75	Yes
H	\$13,500,000	400	10		Yes

\* Includes student volunteers not involved in university or college curriculum based community-engaged learning placements.

### Data Analysis

After collecting data in each action research cycle, it was important to analyze and reflect on the information in order to adjust plans for future focus and action. At the end of the inquiry, the learning from each cycle needed to be connected and considered as a whole, identifying context, connections, and themes.

Data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you've learned. Working with the data, you describe, create explanations, pose hypotheses, develop theories, and link your story to other stories. To do so you must categorize, synthesize, search for patterns, and interpret the data you have collected. (Glesne, 2006, p. 147)

After the interviews were audio-recorded, I reviewed the tapes and chose not to do verbatim transcripts. Using an interview logging process (Glesne, 2006), I recorded, in writing, important phrases and sentences from each interview in writing. At the same

time, I utilized the recorder's counter to note the location of phrases on the recording. Information was documented in chart and map form, and initial analytical comments related to each theme were also recorded. The maps and charts were compared to summary notes from the interviews for accuracy and continuity. Focus group proceedings were recorded by me, using summary notes and through compiling the written summaries and narratives of the research participants.

The qualitative aspects of the research focus on conversations and words as the currency. My analysis was of text rather than numbers, with the goal of gaining better understanding of people and how they can effectively work together. Glesne (2006) suggests the use of log and memo writing, rudimentary coding through themes, and broad, generic analytic files to assist in organizing data for easier analysis. As I deconstructed and analyzed the data, it was important to think of the entire process and holistically consider the importance of each piece of information in the context of the inquiry

As a highly visual learner, I chose to map themes and supporting ideas through several rounds of reviewing data. I initially defined codes in my first data review, which enabled me to develop the maps, adding depth through multiple sorts of the data. Maps, charts, and other diagrams were also used to support my reflection and graphically summarize emerging ideas. Maps were also used to summarize recommendations and to structure the major project report.

### Ethical Issues

Undertaking research with academic freedom is both a privilege and a responsibility. Personal integrity, coupled with ethical research conduct, created the

principles upon which my research was conducted. Throughout my study, several policies also guided my design and actions. They are congruent with undertaking research using human subjects. As a student of Royal Roads University and Faculty at Grant MacEwan College, I adhered to the principles defined in the Royal Roads University's (2007) *Research Ethics Policy*. I reviewed relevant sections of the *Tri-Council Policy on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada [Tri-Council], 1998) and the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Integrity in Research and Scholarship* (Tri-Council, 2007). I also considered relevant access to information and privacy legislation related to all parties. Although undertaking research external to my employer, Grant MacEwan College, I considered the *Ethical Review of Research with Human Participants* (Grant MacEwan College, 2006), consulted with the Chair of the Ethics Review Committee, the College's Research Officer, and successfully underwent ethics review within the College. Ethics review approval by both Royal Roads University and Grant MacEwan College was granted, based on small changes in the research participant letter of invitation.

Royal Roads University's (2007) *Research Ethics Policy* focuses on eight principles, which guided the research. They are: (a) respect for human dignity, (b) respect for free and informed consent, (c) respect for vulnerable persons, (d) respect for privacy and confidentiality, (e) respect for justice and inclusiveness, (f) balancing benefits and harm, (g) minimizing harm, and (h) maximizing benefit (Section D, ¶ 2).

*Informed Consent*

In all cases, consent was requested of prospective participants; they were informed that their participation was voluntary; that they could discontinue their participation at any time; and that their choice not to participate would not result in any consequence. They were told about the purpose, methodology, and dissemination of the completed study. Any potential threats to their well-being were also discussed. As participants were senior staff or board members in nonprofit organizations, none were deemed to be vulnerable persons. It is, however, the practice of some nonprofit organizations to include clients and consumers on their boards. I was sensitive to this issue and ready to respond accordingly.

*Privacy and Confidentiality*

Respecting the rights of participants to privacy and confidentiality is critical to building trusting and respectful relationships and to encourage full and authentic participation. Anonymity of interview participants was ensured through data collection methods that did not identify individual participants. Focus group participants were asked verbally to maintain confidentiality; however, my inability to control this factor was noted. In several instances individuals noted their participation in the research to peers. As the researcher, I was conscious that using the college's facilities for data collection might compromise the anonymity of research participants, so insured facilities were in a location where the interviews would not be questioned by peers.

*Harm and Benefits*

Potential harm and benefits, as outcomes of the study, were carefully considered. The Tri-Council (1998) policy statement on ethical conduct defines minimal risk to

research participants, as activity that does not present greater harm than that which individuals might encounter in daily living. It is my belief that participation in this research project fits within the realm of minimal risk, consequently reducing likelihood of harm to participants.

Ethical considerations related to the proposed project included the possible harm to critical relationships between organizations, by creating focus on a currently ambiguous issue. I was aware that instigating the inquiry would disturb the status quo and create greater awareness of challenges, as well as benefits of current partnerships. I was concerned that I not jeopardize current relationships between Edmonton area colleges and universities and their nonprofit partners. It was important for me to reinforce that I was not a representative of my college employer within the context of the research. I reinforced my ethical duty to confidentiality throughout, recognizing that both the research participants and I, as a researcher, are part of many of the same networks. I also did not want to confuse the existing ECVO (2007a) Community Service-Learning initiative with my inquiry, although it might appear as a subset of some of the experiences noted by research participants. I was careful to clarify these points. Finally, I was especially concerned that I not needlessly consume community partner resources and capacity in the research process, especially based on the related theme of the research.

At the same time, I believed that the research held many potential benefits to multiple stakeholders, including students, universities, colleges, nonprofit organizations, and the wider community. Glesne (2006) discusses the importance of reciprocity and mutual benefit when involving research participants (p. 142).

It was my hope that the inquiry process and recommendations would build capacity for ECVO in serving its members through research, education, and perhaps advocacy. Upon completion of the action research project, compiled and analyzed data, as well as recommendations, were made available to the sponsor, in appropriate formats that respected ethical considerations and copyright guidelines. In addition to a copy of the thesis document, it was important to me to provide practical deliverables that would assist the sponsor in accurately and easily sharing the information with their membership and other nonprofit organizations. The value of proposed deliverables was re-visited with the sponsoring organization part way through the project. Through learning dialogues and in written format, I will deliver presentation notes and materials, as well as a brief article suitable for website and newsletter use. These arrangements have been confirmed with the sponsor for appropriate future delivery congruent with the organization's needs. The content of these materials will be written in summary style and developed with accessible language. The organization may not, otherwise, have the resources to move the learning into the realm of their members, unless the research findings are ready to be easily communicated and discussed. Providing this value-added material recognizes the support of the sponsor and also ensures that my research involvement has the potential to build capacity, rather than create a capacity drain. I believe these actions are congruent with the theme of the research and, additionally, are aligned with my values and professional ethics as a researcher.

The intent of my research question was to be inclusive of all nonprofit stakeholders in the community-engaged learning partnership issue. The research dealt with the collective experiences of a number of organizations, and, in turn, I hope the

collective experiences will inform enhanced practice by all partners in the community-engaged learning process. These propositions support the principles of balanced harm and benefit.

### *Researcher Bias*

Awareness of personal bias is an important aspect of being an ethical researcher. Glesne (2006) describes the need for researchers to carefully consider their actions in taking on roles that exploit participants, which advocate for a particular outcome, or that seek to intervene or reform (pp. 133–138). Block (2000) emphasizes a consultant's need to focus on the process, acting as a steward of focused and ethical facilitation. This approach also describes the researcher's role and accountability in the research process. My main bias is grounded in my belief that community-engaged learning partnerships are not meeting their full potential and may become unsustainable, consequently creating a loss of valuable experiential learning opportunities. It was important to seek out multiple perspectives related to this issue. As both faculty and a participant in the nonprofit sector, I believe I was sensitive and balanced in my perspective, through active reflection and dialogue. I sought council from my major project advisor, sponsor, and peers in assessing this issue.

### *Conflict of Interest*

Power inequities can also influence ethical practice in research. Palys (2003) states, "Particularly when we are in a position of power over participants, we must live up to our obligations to maintain their dignity and treat them with care" (p. 120). As a faculty member in a college program that provides credit programming related to leadership and management in nonprofit organizations, I was cognizant of conflict of

interest should a student emerge as a research participant. I understood the need to disqualify the student, and possibly their organization, as a research participant should this arise, although it did not. In addition, I planned to disqualify any staff or faculty who report to me or funder that supports projects I manage. It was possible for prospective participants to have dual roles in both community organizations and college. Through the invitation and consent process, I considered methodology that would have prospective participants self-identify this conflict.

Glesne (2006) notes, “The degree to which your research is ethical depends on your continual communication and interaction with research participants throughout the study. Researchers alone must not be the arbiters of this critical research issue” (p. 146). I tried to be vigilant in recognizing emerging contextual issues and in involving others in defining ethical conduct.

Action research was chosen to fully reflect the purpose of the inquiry and the perspectives of research participants. The scope of the research was framed through reflection on focused questions and participant selection. Methodology, including the decision to engage the same participants individually and in a group dialogue, was chosen to deepen the level of understanding of inquiry. Organizational and analysis methods related to qualitative data analysis were applied to the data collected. Ethical conduct was considered in all phases of planning and implementation. These process issues created a framework for the interpretation of inquiry findings that follow in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

### Data Analysis

Data, related to factors influencing the value of student placements to community-based nonprofit organizations, were collected. Interviews and a focus group were used to generate narrative and dialogue. The resulting data were reviewed during and following collection. Themes were identified to organize and facilitate analysis of the data. Initial themes were tentatively developed as interviews were conducted, resulting in a framework for dialogue used to guide the focus group. After the data collection process was completed, as data analysis was initiated, and as research participants were contacted to check for accuracy, information was amended by deletion, clarification, or addition. The resulting themes are reflected in the presentation of findings and discussion in this chapter.

The qualitative analysis of this research inquiry uses words as the means of discovery, rather than quantitative measures. My analysis was of conversation and text rather than numbers, with the goal of gaining better understanding of people and how they can effectively work together.

After collecting data in each action research cycle, it was important to analyze and reflect on the information in order to adjust plans for future focus and action. During and at the end of the inquiry, the learning from each cycle was linked and considered as a whole, identifying context, connections, and themes. As I deconstructed and analyzed the data, it was important to think of the entire process and holistically consider the importance of each piece of information in the context of the inquiry

As a highly visual learner, I chose to map themes and supporting ideas during several rounds of data review. I utilized recordings and personal notes from the interviews, as well as notes from clarifying correspondence and conversations with research participants. In addition I reviewed the stories and notes recorded by research participants in the focus group, as well as my own notes. I initially defined codes in my first review of the information, which enabled me to develop theme maps, adding depth through multiple sorts of the data. Maps, charts, and other diagrams were also used to support my reflection and graphically summarize emerging ideas. These documents were again compared to summary notes from the interviews and focus group for accuracy and continuity.

I chose to use narrative inquiry as part of the data collection process, so continued this approach by reporting results in a narrative style to preserve both the affective and cognitive qualities of the experiences shared by research participants. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that narrative is a means of both hearing and telling stories in order to understand and make meaning from experience. Connected with the research process, narrative inquiry requires us to think of the continuity and wholeness of a person's experiences. Geertz (as cited in Clandinin & Connelly, pp. 16–17) describes narrative experience as a parade that captures change in the whole over time. He considers the tentativeness of how we make meaning and how perspective shapes our thinking and actions. He describes our position in the parade, and how it influences how we know what we know. If we shift our position, our knowing changes. The second consideration is that the parade moves, even if we do not, and our relative position and viewpoint also change. This metaphor captures some of the themes of the metastory.

Perspective and vantage point colour our understanding of situations and relationships. This is a critical element in campus–community relationships and particularly in a collaborative partnership, where values, experiences, goals, and cultures converge, and where change is ongoing.

A narrative approach also honours the incompleteness of any research. “The narrative inquirer concludes the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling the stories of experiences that make up people’s lives ... Simply stated narrative inquiry is stories lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

### Study Findings

Findings from the research inquiry are presented in three formats. They are a focused environmental scan, a series of metastories and related discussions, and a summary of factors that respond to the research question.

The first discussion provides a context for the remainder of the results. It briefly describes the environment in which research participants carry out their work, particularly in community-engaged learning initiatives related to college and university student placements. This discussion provides a larger view of the purpose, culture, and values that inform and influence how community-based nonprofit organizations relate to campus-community collaboration.

The second format presents research findings, from the interviews and focus groups, through a metastory, which is congruent with the narrative inquiry approach used in the data collection. Narrative was intentionally chosen for both seeking the experience of research participants and telling their stories. This approach supported my desire to give staff in community-based nonprofit organizations an opportunity to share their

perspectives more fully, without the confines of more narrow structure. The metastory is a composite narrative delivered by one hypothetical community partner. It includes direct anonymous quotes from all research participants, as individuals, as well as some quotes from their dialogue in the focus group. These quotes are presented in bolded italicized typeface. Minimal bridging and clarifying text, displayed in unbolded typeface, was added to support and link the ideas. The metastory is presented in four parts, each containing themes that influence the desire and ability of community-based nonprofit partners to host University and College students.

The metastories connect and integrate the experiences of eight individuals who work in nonprofit community organizations, who have significant and diverse experience in their roles, who understand the culture and capacity issues of the voluntary, nonprofit sector in Canada, and whose organizations have hosted University and College students through community-engaged learning experiences(see Appendix C: Invitation). While the composite story reflects the range and diversity of experiences described by research participants, it is not universal in its elements. The shared experiences of research participants were generally consistent; however, situational factors also influenced their perspectives. These will be further discussed in limitations of the study.

Through the metastories, the research participants described the benefits of campus–community partnerships, specifically those related to student placements for the purpose of community-engaged learning, to their organizations. They also discussed the barriers and challenges in these relationships that reduce value to their organizations. Finally they identified their hopes for the future and the related change required for

sustaining meaningful student placements and developing the full potential of community-engaged learning related to their roles.

Each part of the metastory is followed by discussion and a summary of key factors that influence the value of student placement initiatives to community-based nonprofit organizations. The discussion includes the perspectives of the research participant and their opinions about the nature of effective community-engaged learning placement initiatives, as well as comparative perspectives from related literature. The chapter concludes with a summary of factors that influence the value of community-engaged learning student placements to nonprofit community partners.

#### *Contextual Issues Influencing Community-Engaged Learning Placements*

All research participants reported that their organization hosted college or university students in the past year. All but one respondent hosted both undergraduate and graduate students. The students were engaged in curricular-based experiential learning in community-based nonprofit organizations. Within this inquiry, community-engaged learning includes practicums, field placements, service learning, and other forms of experiential learning activity situated in community organizations and used for earning credit in higher education programs. Community partners also identified an increase in requests for information for the purposes of informal and formal research, which may not be identified as a student placement, but that requires staff time, and organizational resources.

Requests for student placements were largely from Edmonton region public colleges and universities, although half of the organizations had hosted students from rural areas, from smaller municipalities, from institutions in adjacent provinces, and

occasionally from other countries. Students travelled from other localities because of the unique mission of the community organization, or because their own community could not provide an urban context for study. Four organizations noted ongoing relationships with faith-based colleges and universities.

While not the focus of this inquiry, it is contextually important to note that seven participants spoke, at length, about other kinds of community-engaged learning requests received by their agencies that influence their capacity to integrate additional students. The largest group includes students in secondary schools, seeking work placement or service learning experiences related to both mandated and voluntary curricular activity. At the same time, even younger students are often encouraged to connect with community organizations through school, faith, and leisure youth groups. Graff (2006) and Hall et al. (2000) describe significant growth in mandated community service related to education. In addition, five participants noted hosting adult learners in training and employment programs operated by other nonprofit organizations. Two organizations also support mandated community service placements linked to the justice system. Coupled with significant volunteer involvement reported by research participants (Figure 1), all forms of community-service and nonprofit workplace learning combined place a significant load on community-based partners. This is congruent with the conclusions of Graff (2006). While no single activity created undue stress on the community organizations, the cumulative effect of growth in popularity of these activities is significant.

According to the research participants, the current infrastructure capacity and human resources required to effectively integrate students, and benefit from campus

involvement, is challenged. While such growth may be interpreted as a positive element of organizational capacity building (Floyd, 2007; Kibbe et al., 2004; Lashby, 2004), it also consumes organizational resources in the process.

The current staffing shortages in non-profit organizations negatively impact the agency's capacity to manage and support the student learning experience. As the human resources crisis continues to erode the nonprofit community organizations, a significant number of opportunities to partner will be lost. (Research Participant H)

Existing capacity influences our ability to build more. If we don't have the resources to involve students we just have to pass on the opportunity. (Research Participant F)

Organizations participating in the research inquiry host college and university students from many areas of study. These include, but are not limited to nursing, social work, speech pathology, child and youth care, early childhood education, volunteer management, disability studies, commerce, education, theology, office administration, physical, recreational and occupational therapy, Arts, psychology, sociology, business management, communications, recreation and leisure studies, public relations, marketing, information technology, fine arts, and other areas. Within these disciplines, students can be further segmented by education level, ranging from new undergraduates to doctoral candidates. They can also be sorted by the type of activity they participate in. These include research, service delivery and infrastructure building.

The participating community organizations support community-engaged learning placements using diverse staffing, processes, and infrastructure approaches. The staff liaisons assigned to work with students, and their instructors, are chosen dependant upon the needs of the educational programs, the availability and qualifications of staff, and the kind of placement requested. All but one of the participating organizations employs a

professional manager of volunteers, who is frequently the first point of contact for requests. One organization employs a Community Liaison Manager, whose role includes volunteer and student engagement, among other responsibilities. Another agency coordinated all student placements through their Human Resources Manager, although students seeking career-related volunteer roles, initiated on their own, were referred to the Volunteer Manager. Another participant, a Program Manager, noted that program areas were responsible for all student interaction in their organization. Other community agencies are too small to have specialists. Front line program staff, leadership volunteers, or the Executive Director screen, interview, and place the students themselves.

Participants universally noted that they have developed enhanced organizational policies, processes, and infrastructure to support community-engaged learning, in recent years.

We used to have more problems. It was chaotic. We treated every request differently. With more requests we had to develop more structure, more processes. We have clearer criteria, policies and are more likely to say no. We had some negative experiences that lead to us developing a committee that reviews all requests. The committee represents all areas of the organization. It ensures transparency and considers the whole organization not just one program. I think we've improved quality for students and for us. (Research Participant F)

All research participants indicated that both they, and their organizations, were highly supportive of student involvement under the right circumstances. Challenges noted were largely related to the degree of investment by students and campus partners in relation to their expectation of outcomes.

There are three kinds of student placements. It's like a continuum. There are those that don't ask a lot, don't give a lot, and don't get a lot, but we all benefit enough that it's OK. There are some that expect a lot, but give a lot, and so get a lot in return. These are great. And then there's those that expect a lot and have unrealistic expectations and don't give a lot. They are the main problem. (Research Participant G)

All participants described working in a nonprofit organization, especially in human services, as very challenging. While they all indicated their commitment to the nonprofit sector, they noted significant financial stress and understaffed workplaces with frequent turnover at the front line.

Most of us who stay love our work, but it's very demanding and people-oriented. Dealing with more people, including students, can be both a help and a hindrance. (Research Participant D)

Staff I work with, work hard enough and don't get paid enough, to take on more challenges. We need to set boundaries, to say no, to protect staff. We can't make more work for them. I won't create more stress for them. (Research Participant B)

Finally, research participants reinforced their personal and organizational choices to support community-engaged learning, while expressing concern about the unrecognized effort required to create effective and meaningful experiences for students.

I think we go out of our way to cooperate. We know the importance of learning on the job. As a community we share in responsibility to learn and support others learning. The village concept. (Research Participant E)

I'm not sure the colleges and universities know how much effort we invest in working with students who may never actually serve in our agency. We help lots of students find opportunities outside our own agency. We give them leads. We help them understand the system. And the ones that do join us get a lot more than technical skill practice. We spend a lot of time mentoring. We encourage and coach. We create and customize opportunities that fit the individual. There's lots of supervision and just talking with them. We're patient and forgiving. We're like an iceberg. There's more under the surface than meets the eye. (Research Participant C)

In summary, research participants described environmental issues that are important to consider in placing the inquiry research issue in context. They noted the diversity of community-engaged learning collaborations in which they are requested to participate and discussed the increasing demands on community-based nonprofit organizations to be part of experiential learning in each of the K-12 system, noncredit

career and employment programs, and higher education. They described the rise in mandated community service and other articulated learning outcomes related to curricular or co-curricular community service. Finally, the community partners recounted the effort that many community organizations invest in placing students with no direct or measurable outcome in playing this critical role. This assistance is often broader community information and referral, nonprofit sector orientation, and encouragement, rather than information specific to their individual agencies. All participants described ethical responsibility for this assistance in an increasingly complex community and a cautious willingness to provide reasonable support. At the same time, the community partners described a lack of awareness by campus partners, funders, policy makers, and sometimes those in their own organization about this important role.

### *Stories of Collaboration*

The next section of this chapter highlights, through narrative using metastories, the community partners' experiences in collaborating with campus partners to facilitate community-engaged learning through student placements. Each story is followed by brief interpretive discussion.

### *Creating Value through Relationship*

The first story describes the community partners' experiences with the benefits students in placements bring directly to community organizations, and the indirect value nonprofit community organizations often receive through their relationship with placement students. The story of multiple research participants is told through the eyes of one composite character. For readability purposes, the bolded italic text represents direct

quotes from research participants, while unbolded sections of the story are used to denote bridging text added for clarification purposes.

*I've always felt we needed students. They bring what others can't. They bring their youth. They bring fresh perspective. They help me feel connected to another generation. I'm amazed at what they can express and how much they have to learn! They bring an off-the-wall approach; stuff that's not normally on the agenda when we are stuck in our ruts. They're generative. They make me ask, "Why do I do what I do?" They help us, as practitioners, to reflect on our own practice. We go along with blinders on until they make us question. They help us know where our strengths are, and where they are not. Students help us see another world. I'm inspired by their devotion to learning because of their curiosity. We learn from their reactions, and how they learn. They provide staff development opportunities to work with individuals we don't usually work with.*

*They bring energy and motivation. They plough in and work right through. If well prepared, they can add momentum to move stalled projects and initiatives. I remember several projects that amazed me. Students developed new programs from start to finish. Another time they saw how down we were. On their own initiative they developed practical resources to help us deal more effectively with stress. It felt good that they understood. Another time a student actually left us with a workable file system that we are still using. Survey design and implementation assistance let us better understand how our staff felt about our organization's changing focus and the workplace. And there's lots more examples.*

*Some of their work is phenomenal. Some of it changes people's lives. Families have told us how much a student relationship or time has meant to their loved one. We need young people as role models for our clients. Some bring their language, their culture, their life experience. They carry our message into the world. They know and touch who we are. They feel what we feel.*

*I see them first in a group of thirty, and I often wonder does it make any difference. But sometimes it does and I know they know there's something they can do with their social values. They'll remember twenty years back, as a student, and they will advocate, they will donate, or they will volunteer. They talk . . . they feel connected all their life.*

*They keep us connected to the wider community . . . to their families, their friends, their instructors. They help us expand out networks and in turn reach prospective donors, volunteers, board members and staff. Students are ambassadors. They take our message into the community. They buy into us. They like us. They believe in us. This sometimes helps when if they want a job and we can't offer high wages, but we can offer a real relationship. Being here is the start of what could be a career as a staff or volunteer. Students are untapped potential . . . you just never know.*

*Besides the students themselves, placements give us the opportunity to say, with pride, we do some things differently here! We can help shape the practice of future coworkers and colleagues. Placements give us a chance to identify and correct student and faculty misperceptions. It's a chance to do a*

*reality check and gently educate faculty. It provides opportunity for exchange.*

*The more professionals who know about our standards and practices, the better.*

*Student placements create a connection, a conduit to the university or college and the institution's resources. We get to know each other—students, instructors and our agency, so when we need each other we can call. Student placements are a critical human resources and succession strategy for us. We get to know students and they get to know us. This may be the biggest reason we continue to accept students, even when things are tough. University and college placements sometimes bring us process consultation and resources we can't afford. Some faculty support students and as well add their own professional presence and consulting expertise. Students often come with technology, specialized expertise, or resources we can't normally access. Students are current with research, knowledge, and learning. They have the capacity to assist organizations that are short on resources, to update and maintain a current knowledge base. They bring resources to nonprofits that may not otherwise be accessible due to staffing and funding constraints. Students are also supported by the learning institution and bring the credibility or credentials of instructors like preceptors to the experience. This has been very valuable to our organization, in that outside resources have been made accessible, leveraged, or have been mobilized more efficiently because of the connection.*

*Indirectly student placements help us broaden our network. By sharing our story more widely, faculty and students increase awareness of what we do and the kind of support we need. They are key to our community-engagement*

*activities, including advocacy, education, volunteer involvement, and fund development.*

*I've made a lot of wonderful relationships with college staff along the way. I know they fight many of the same battles we do. I enjoy working with them. They know things we don't know or have the luxury of focus we often don't have.*

*The benefit in community-engaged learning is that the sky's the limit! If we are creative, open, and focused on assets, there's something for everyone in a collaborative relationship. If we don't get stuck in our own narrow world. Mostly we look at student involvement as time well spent. We need to understand that outcomes are long term. We may sometimes see no value now. What we are building today, we may not see results from for years, and that's OK. That's what a real learning organization understands.*

The community partners in this research shared the joys and positive outcomes of student involvement in community-engaged learning. They described the attitudes, energy, perspectives, creativity, learning, and curiosity they value in student relationships (Jacoby, 2003). They further recounted the kinds of technical skills and the focus that students can bring to achieving their organization's mission. These outcomes bring personal meaning and satisfaction to staff that support students, increasing the likelihood that they will support future student involvement.

The research participants also summarized some of the indirect value that community-engaged student placements generate for their organization. These included connections to the human, information, and physical resources of colleges and

universities. The community partners related that the community-engagement value developed through social networks that may result in longer-term human resource, information, financial, and adaptive capacity (Blumenthal, 2003; Floyd, 2007; Goldenberg, 2006; Hall et al., 2003). They described the value of bridging social capital (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Putnam, 2000) developed through relationships with students, faculty, and other staff associated with campus partners. The research participants further related the desire to act as learning partners in shaping curriculum and practice. They expressed empathy for the challenges faculty and other campus partners face in facilitating community-engaged learning.

These research findings support the notion that community partners in campus–community learning collaborations identify significant value in, and support of, student placements. This value contributes to several areas of nonprofit organizational capacity development. These are human resource capacity, financial capacity, and structural capacity (Hall et al., 2003).

Structural capacity includes relational and network capacity, planning and development capacity, and infrastructure and process capacity (Hall et al., 2003). The authors further define human resources capacity as the ability to focus staff, volunteers, and other human resources in support of organizational and community goals. The competencies, skills, motivations, attitudes, behaviours, and knowledge of individuals and groups are paramount to achieving in all other capacity areas. They further posit that financial capacity describes the generation and deployment of financial resources. While community-engaged learning may be seen as an expense, it can also be seen as an investment in future funding. Structural capacity includes relational and network capacity

and the ability to form and draw on relationships with members, clients, funders, partners, donors, volunteers, regulators, and other stakeholders. These relationships strongly link to the community-engagement benefits research participants described. Planning and development capacity ranges from policy development through to planning processes that frame the organization's work. These were illustrated by community partners who applauded student research and project management. Finally, infrastructure and process capacity provides for operational resources that include facilities, intellectual property, and other products required to deliver service. This capacity was more likely contributed through faculty and staff or through campus institutional resource sharing, than by direct student involvement, and was seen as less prevalent than desired by research participants. Research participants reported varied levels of capacity development occurring in the relationship; however, the weakest contributions were often those most valued by the community partner.

*When a Present is Not a Gift?*

The community partners shifted focus in the following conversation and reflected on the many challenges they have experienced in working with campus partners and students. They began with concerns related to issues with faculty, campus staff, and the systems they represent. Then they turned to student behaviour and expectations.

*Student placements can be challenging. **There is often no immediate value to our agency. We expend precious resources in the process. Focus on future outcomes is important, but we can starve in the here and now, waiting for our current investment to pay off. Our board, our funders, and the community measure us by visible outcomes. Having students isn't a formal or mandated part of our***

*business; our mission. We need the universities and colleges, to understand what win-win looks like.*

*I'm always amazed by the attitude of entitlement from some campus partners. There's an assumption that we will take students without discussion or consultation. And that we should be grateful too. Students often reflect the same attitude and tell us what they'll do and under what conditions. We do a lot of educating about boundaries and where decisions are made on our turf.*

*Faculty usually have good intentions, but the intentions are not always matched with good research and planning. I've been burnt. It was a heck of a lot of work and I won't be quick to say yes again. We invest a lot upfront, in planning, in screening, orientation, supervision, and evaluation. The cost of, and to, staff is high and there are few guarantees. We often interview and screen ten students to get one who is a fit. Our staff filter numerous calls weekly that could be reduced by a bit of upfront research by students or their instructors. This includes pre-admission volunteer hours. Programs have a list of agencies they recommend to prospective students. Sometimes the information is given by inexperienced or ill-informed staff in the institution without any regular updates. Students call or show up assuming we'll find them hours. We don't want, and often can't accommodate large numbers of prospective students with no related skills or institutional support systems. The campus partners leave us in a bad position. They shift the responsibility to us rather than the student or themselves. More self-screening and instructor assessment could be done by the*

*student and the educational institution. There needs to be more effort and resources to do this on their part.*

*I know of some programs with reasonable numbers, but others have way too many students for instructors to prepare and support effectively. I get annoyed when they send unprepared and unappreciative students. I know quality control is challenging, but they make it really hard on us. By allowing indiscriminate placements, some programs cause us to be babysitters. I am often concerned about the readiness of students to learn and contribute. I wish instructors would get involved more. Some don't even know their students' names. While I know many of them are overloaded too, their primary role is working with students. Ours is not. Their lack of student support takes away from our ability to get other work done.*

*Student involvement costs us in direct expenses, but it's usually worthwhile. We usually reimburse mileage if students are doing work on our behalf, and sometimes parking. We are short on space and computers, which is sometimes difficult, especially when some permanent staff don't have these things. If the student is specialized, like a graduate student offering service or consultation on our behalf, they need privacy. We like to treat students like staff. If there's recognition costs or something special going on, we include students. This is just a cost of doing business. We don't expect cost-free service, but help from campus partners and funders is always appreciated.*

*The length of placement is important too. Full-time condensed placements are very taxing. Students are with you every minute of every day. We*

*split students between staff, so that staff can get their work done. Other times, with planning, a short condensed placement is good. It keeps everyone focused and motivated. But that's the exception. Most abbreviated placements are a liability. If it's a short placement, just placing the student eats up most of their time commitment. Many programs have complex mandates and expectations they assume we'll implement, especially in a short timeframe.*

*We've never been consulted, when programs or curriculum are designed that impact our organization. We may be superficially asked about a specific student placement, but seldom consulted in any detail about how the placement experience could be improved to meet our needs. Some places are better than others. The only time I ended a placement early, things were terrible. I offered to help the institution and program to enhance things. They've never followed up.*

*I feel frustrated when we're pushed to exploit clients. We don't do it, but there's a disconnect between ethics taught in school and what we are asked to do in placements. Short-term, drop-in/drop-out placements don't encourage trust, relationships, or confidentiality. It makes for poor group dynamics. Complicated risk management can be an issue too. Sometimes our needs are respected, but sometimes questioned as too complicated. We are often asked to release confidential information required for assignments and student reports. Professionals who teach should know better. Where does our role in monitoring and teaching integrity and ethics begin and end? I wonder about the effort that's made or not, because of who we are.*

*Campus partners are often in a hurry, and we are expected to drop what we are doing for their deadlines. We could benefit everyone more if we had lead time to plan and forecast. Our operations don't always mesh with college and university terms, and instructors who don't have enough lead time to properly work with us, because of their schedules. There is often no consistency between programs of study or years, so it's hard to predict patterns.*

*Placement activities can either energize and motivate staff, or they can demoralize them. Student, instructor, and institutional lack of knowledge about the sector often affects whether we feel valued. Sometimes instructors don't see us as peers. Certainly not teachers. We're sometimes seen as "less than," even when we are professionals, because of where we work and our willingness to work for less money. Some of my coworkers have been told they're wasting their talent. Our credentials exclude us from some student relationships, even after we've done a lot of homework on their behalf.*

*I feel angry when instructors call in desperation, especially at the last minute. I feel manipulated. They position us for poor community relations. It damages our image with students and others even when the quality and timing of a request has little to do with us. When I say no for a good reason they just hear no! I feel that we often put more effort into preparing students than their instructors do. The process can be a killer, with little help from instructors. The placement often starts out strong, but when the paperwork and logistics are in place, they abandon us. It's like they check us off a list that never gets revisited.*

*Support and direction from programs vary, but range from rigid and unworkable to nonexistent.*

*There is little recognition or reciprocity from the universities and colleges, as a whole. We are mostly taken for granted. Some programs and individuals are great, but there is generally no acknowledgement of our effort by their institution. There is no observed understanding by most colleges and universities that we contribute a lot to student learning and their institution's mandate. There are few favours in return when we ask for access to resources or try to recruit volunteers from the campus community. They acknowledge funders and donors, as partners but seldom us as their learning partners. If our mandate didn't have education and community engagement in it, it would be hard to justify the resources it takes to include students.*

*We've had struggles with funders and policy makers too. They don't always understand this is real work, and it takes resources. Some are great and recognize this investment and why we are doing it. Others don't allow us to record students as either volunteers or staff. They just disappear in the stats.*

*Student expectations and behaviors are interesting. They don't always understand that this is work ... this is life. They want a great placement right next to their school. They fly in and fly out. Most students don't stay and volunteer after their prescribed commitment. Students are often in their own heads and without much life experience. They can't balance the two. Maturity and expectations can be challenging as a result. Some students are wounded healers, and others are survivors who have to worry about just getting the bills*

*paid. They're not ready to learn, and I wish instructors would figure this out before we get them. I like to be creative, to try to find positions that work for students, but I can't customize every request . . . not on top of everything else I do. There's often pressure to create great opportunities, with very little flexibility on the part of students and their instructors.*

*Some students don't engage at a level that allows for meaningful learning or relationships. Students expect interesting and exciting roles that they are often not qualified to play. What students give is often not proportional to what they expect to get. Many don't finish or share projects. I've been burned by students who take advantage of the honour system and self-management. We often don't ever see them again. Limited lead time is a big problem too. They leave things to the last minute and expect we'll help. Last minute paperwork we didn't know about. Making arrangements for their pre-admission volunteer hours is especially difficult with no lead time. They all come to us a few weeks before they apply to a college and expect we can find them several hundred hours of career-related volunteer work.*

*Sometimes there's a net gain with students, but only when they are skilled or bring some other special quality. But that's not the only reason we get involved. There's often not much immediate benefit to the agency, but we have an obligation to community, to enlarge people's perspectives and provide learning opportunities. Even the best students take time and energy.*

All research participants described challenges encountered with students, with the faculty and staff of campus partner institutions, and with other stakeholders who influence the value of student placements related to community-engaged learning.

The community partners summarized concerns about the lack of consultation and lead time provided to accommodate effective planning. This impacts the relative value generated for all stakeholders and increases the resources consumed within the community organization, when efficient and effective planning cannot occur.

Research participants described the varied and relative value of different lengths and formats of placements. They described the length of the placement as paramount to most valuable capacity building. Longer placements usually netted more significant contributions by students. This is congruent with the work of Enos and Morton (2003), who compare time, depth and complexity in learning partnerships and their likelihood of moving from transactional to transformational outcomes. At the same time Sandy (2007) suggests that other factors influence value more than the length of the placement. She does not describe if the cost to develop that value, considers the role of the community partner, netting differing results.

The research participants expressed frustration about the lack of preparation and ongoing support to some students and inadequate campus staff resources invested in the relationship. They noted diminished staffing capacity as a result of dealing with unprepared students.

The community partners discussed ethical practice and mutual professional respect issues, and how each influences staff morale. Their comments are supported by Leiderman et al. (2003) in their discussion of the importance of parity in healthy campus–

community partnerships. This notion also connects to the human resources capacity issues cited by Hall et al. (2003). Finally the community partner discussed the expectations of students and the degree to which they invest in meaningful placements and continue to support the organization.

*Working Together Tomorrow*

The next story describes the community partners' hopes for the future and the potential they see in student placements. They imagined what could be if partners in community-engaged learning worked together.

*There are so many things we could do together, if we could get past the basics.*

*The logistics stuff. We're stuck there. We need to get the rules of engagement settled so we can move forward.*

*It would be great to see a Foundation–Campus–Community partnership to identify agency capacity to engage students in new and more interdisciplinary ways. There are great local examples of students involved in health and social work disciplines from the same institution working across program and faculty boundaries, to design and provide services for inner city youth. I could see more work to involve students in the Social Sciences in providing context and understanding around an issue and working with more applied programs to get the best of both. For example, an agency-run anti-bullying program could invite students from education, social work, child and family, and sociology to look at community culture and how it contributes to attitudes and behaviour.*

*I was delighted to hear that an instructor in a graduate program at the university suggested to his students, who were studying surveys and marketing,*

*that they might want to consider approaching a nonprofit organization rather than for-profits regarding their needs of a survey. It was equally exciting when the students contacted us to inquire about the agency's need for a process to gather information and develop a survey. Had time permitted, we discussed the use of focus groups as another approach to provide us with a process and information that we were seeking. I hope that more learning institutions consider taking the leadership to create these very valuable opportunities. I wonder if that could be more formalized, where instructors are intentional and consult when developing learning opportunities for students and relationships with nonprofits.*

*I also like the idea of multiple agencies joining together through a convener like ECVO or United Way, using an interagency approach, to deal with a common cross-cutting issue. For example, the insurance coverage challenges many of us face. This would involve less traditional programs and student groups in helping us build capacity rather than serving clients directly. They'd see a different perspective too. Or I could see law or other appropriate students identifying, advising, and educating on common issues, and others learning more about boards as they serve in and evolve board internship programs. Students could be a real asset in helping support advocacy initiatives through research, writing, and their networks.*

*I'd like to see us think of our community together. Collectively. Holistically not in pieces. Why can't we invite the best from several colleges and universities to work together with us on a systemic issue? Like housing or*

*literacy or environmental issues. Collaboration in action. Real learning about working together. That's where it's at these days.*

*Some of our best student work comes from their connections to other student-initiated work. Like in clubs or student activist or service groups. We have many college and student volunteers not connected to these educational programs directly. Why not link them to the more formally structured projects if it makes sense? It's all learning if you make it that.*

*Wouldn't it be great to know what programs are new or changed—a way to get a snapshot of the whole institution and a way to connect with them, not so many dead ends? It would be so much easier. It would save so much energy.*

*It would be great to have a more open relationship with universities and colleges. More opportunities to talk to each other, to learn together, to plan together. There are some interesting examples of this starting to happen—mostly about research, through presentations and workshops. There could be more, but we never have time . . . like learning circles . . . maybe exchanges or just some time to get to know each other.*

Research participants described models of collaboration and specific examples of possible initiatives. They discussed interdisciplinary collaboration of multiple programs within a campus. These ideas are also introduced in the work of Jacoby et al. (2003). Research participants considered how both nonprofit organization and campus partners might work together more effectively for the benefit of the wider community and in support of larger change initiatives. The community partners also described cooperation between several institutions of higher learning over a longer term to create systemic

change. Jacoby et al. further described models of cooperation between and within campus institutions, involving academic, student affairs, and student constituents. Research participants considered links between curricular, co-curricular, and non-curricular community-engaged learning, both formal and informal. They compared kinds of service in community-engaged learning initiatives. Some initiatives serve organizational clients directly. Some support research, which may ultimately influence practice. Finally, research participants described initiatives that focus primarily on organizational capacity-building rather than direct work in serving clients.

In the final section of the story the community partners explored the changes required to implement some of their hopes for the future and the processes and infrastructure that might support it.

#### *Towards Enhanced Practice*

*I really believe in student involvement in our agency. It's here to stay. It's critical to learning and to insuring that we have volunteer and staff in future, but it's out of control. We need better mutual planning and ways to communicate with each other's organizations more easily.*

*We can't become adjunct faculty, it's not our role, it's not our mission, but we do want to be learning partners—share the results of student placements, like final reports, evaluations, and project outcomes. I feel cut out of the process. Invite me into the classroom .I'd like to help students understand our environment before they connect with us.*

*Consider me your peer. Respect me as a professional who has a job to do. I'd like to be consulted about learning expectations of students, the design of*

*the placement, and the outcomes of the placement. I'd like to be involved in the student selection process, not just be sent someone.*

*Commit to getting to know me and nonprofit organizations generally.*

*Learn about how we carry out our missions, our funding issues—our challenges. Do more research about our organizations, so you can screen students before they create unnecessary inquiries.*

*To create capacity and benefits that serve us all well, and from a practical perspective, I need your cooperation. Have realistic expectations for the length of the placement. I can do a better job if you provide more flexibility in hours, schedules, and lead time. Provide reflection questions and evaluation tools, so I don't have to develop them. Make evaluations realistic in time and scope. I don't want to be asked if a student I've seen twice will make a good . . . professional. Don't ask me to assess character and issues beyond the scope of the placement or my expertise.*

*Make it easier for me to get to know your college or university. I want to know about opportunities for involvement. I like to understand who I'm working with. Tell me about possibilities and a real contact people.*

*If you like us, support us in other ways. We need your support. Donate time, money, or other resources in another capacity outside of work.*

The research participants invited campus partners to learn more about the voluntary and nonprofit sector, and the day-to-day realities of their organization's mission and operations. They expressed interest in playing a greater role in teaching students about the sector. They asked campus partners for cooperation in consulting more

and providing greater lead time to plan and negotiate. They suggested greater flexibility in shaping placements. These requests support the findings of Sandy (2007). The community partners requested more campus staff investment and support in student placements, including the provision of learning and assessment tools, as well as ongoing supervision.

Access to the wider college and university is important to the community partners. They expressed interest in the growth and evolution of the institution, as well as information about specific areas of study that might link to their mission and operations. They considered the communication and information management systems within both nonprofit community organizations, and campuses that would make information sharing less difficult. The shared experiences of the research participants are summarized in the following conclusions.

### Study Conclusions

The research question studied in this project was “What factors add value to the experience of community-based nonprofit organizations involved in student placements related to community-engaged learning? The sub-questions were:

1. What do nonprofit community partners value in their community-engaged learning involvement with College and University student placements?
2. What challenges de-value the potential benefits of these community-engaged learning partnerships to nonprofit community partners?
3. What factors contribute to capacity building through community-engaged learning partnerships for the nonprofit community partners?

Eight research participants, with combined student hosting knowledge of fifteen organizations and cumulative related experience of more than one hundred and twelve years, shared their experiences and perceptions to answer these questions in part. Their stories revealed universal belief in student experiential learning opportunities in community organizations. They described the tangible, and more subtle, short- and long-term benefits accrued by their individual organizations from the community-engaged learning process. At the same time, they identified many challenges, barriers, and areas of untapped potential. Finally, they reflected on the future and the factors that would sustain their organization's and sector's involvement in community-engaged learning collaborations. They identified issues to be addressed by multiple partners in campus-community relationships, to insure future community-engaged learning thrives and transforms individuals, organizations and community. They reinforced their desire to continue to build and evolve productive relationships with campus partners. Research participants described the many factors that influence the value of community-engaged learning, involving university and college student placements to their community-based nonprofit organizations.

*Seeing Fully: Interdependence and Systems Awareness*

The level of awareness of campus-partners and community-partners, with respect to their interdependent community-engaged learning relationship, influences the focus and motivation of stakeholders to evaluate and enhance practice. Without this awareness there is no understanding of systems connections or sustainability issues. This lack of awareness is supported by a general absence of community-partner presence in the literature (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Sandy & Holland, 2006).

Research participants noted an absence of practical understanding by many campus partners about the day-to-day impact of student placements, and how their actions impact the sustainability of the relationship. While this was particularly true of campus partners, it was also an issue within community partner organizations. Research participants noted that this is also evident when senior administrators and board governors are unaware of the investment that frontline staff makes in building and sustaining effective external relationships. Policy makers, who influence curriculum and funding, may also be removed from capacity-consuming issues resulting from their decisions. This position is further demonstrated when insufficient resources are allocated to student placement facilitation by colleges and universities.

Research participants reinforced their observation that there is low understanding by some campus-partners of the critical and interdependent nature of community-engaged learning opportunities. This lack of awareness jeopardizes both sustainability of current relationships and the possibility of developing future relationships. Many campus-partners seem unaware of the vulnerability of these campus-community learning partnerships.

#### *Knowledge of the Voluntary and Nonprofit Sector*

Research participants described an inconsistent understanding, by campus partners, about the purpose, mission, and roles of the voluntary, nonprofit sector in the wider community. The knowledge of faculty and students, about the nonprofit sector and individual community-based organizations, influences the way in which they interact with community partners and their expectations of community-engaged learning. Lack of

investigation about specific organizations and their reality, further creates gaps in realistic expectations, often causing hard feelings and tension.

*Cross-Sectoral Collaborations as Cross-Cultural Relationships*

Understanding of differing organizational cultures, and the cross-cultural skills to work effectively with one another, is critical in developing trust, communication, and shared goals. Schein (2004) describes organizational culture as “shared assumptions that come to be taken for granted and which determine a group’s behavior. . . . The rules and norms are taught to newcomers in a socialization process that is itself a reflection of that culture” (p. 22). The lack of awareness about differences in organizational culture, between campus and community, can compromise effective communication and relationships. Bolman and Deal (2003) describe structural, symbolic, human resource, and political frames that define aspects of organizational culture and the impact of diverse perspectives and practices related to each realm. This was reflected by research participants in their comments about nonprofit community and campus resources, values, priorities, and respect. Opportunities to explore and consider cultural differences in the context of shared goals may be important to more effective collaborative communication and relationships.

*The Value of Social Capital and Community Engagement Opportunities*

Community partners emphasized the value of social and network capital generated through campus-community relationships, such as student placements. They stressed the importance of ongoing and future opportunities to advocate, recruit staff, volunteers and donors, and to benefit from other forms of community engagement. These outcomes were discussed by all research participants and are one of the major factors that

influence their desire to invest in campus-community initiatives, including student placements. Without effective means to nurture these goals through the campus-community collaboration, the partnership loses considerable value from the community-partner's perspective. The desire and resources required to build such relationships by some colleges and universities is imperative to future success in partnering with the nonprofit community.

#### *Student Placements as a Human Resources Development Strategy*

All research participants described student placements as a critical aspect of their human resources capacity, particularly in insuring a future workforce and volunteer involvement. They described student placements as a catalyst for students in considering paid and volunteer career options in the nonprofit sector. They noted placements were an opportunity to identify and nurture talent, as well as assess prospective staff. Particularly in the current climate of staff and volunteer shortages, they believed that building a relationship with prospective employees and volunteers over time, would allow them more success in Research participants also suggested that student involvement gave them opportunities to shape the practice of future colleagues and to influence the content and processes taught in colleges and universities. The depth and scope of the student experience was noted as a key factor in achieving these goals and an important reason to invest in community-engaged learning.

#### *Partner Preparation and Support*

The preparation of community partners to host students requires well-developed and appropriate tools and processes that consider the community partner's resources and capacity. These enablers must be complete, accessible, realistic, and time sensitive. They

include negotiating, contracting, progress monitoring, learning reflection, and assessing processes and tools. Community partners noted ambiguity in establishment of role clarity and concrete methods of assessing and reporting student work. They further expressed concern for the wide-reaching student assessments they were asked to participate in, which were outside the scope of their resources and expertise.

Research participants universally cited insufficient lead time for planning and forecasting to be a challenge. At the same time, the burden that pre-admission mandated community service makes on them is difficult, when rushed and concentrated in a short period. These mandated volunteer hours are required to apply to many university and college programs and are generally assigned for the purpose of career research. While mandatory pre-admission hours, used for career research and student screening, are seen as helpful by campus programs, they must be reconsidered and if essential, redesigned to consider the needs of community partners. Campuses mandate actions that influence community organizations, while taking no accountability for the outcomes. Prospective students, while following campus admission expectations, do not fall within the realm of campus legal and support systems, consequently often leaving a burden on community partners. The tension and ill-will resulting from some of these experiences, often influence the community-partner's attitude in hosting future student placements.

#### *Student Preparation and Support*

Student preparation and support are critical in developing the full potential of campus-community learning initiatives. Community partners described insufficient involvement by many campus instructors and supervisors. They noted student-instructor ratios that are ineffective and varying priorities of faculty based on their other priorities

and responsibilities. Inadequate supervision and planning conflicts with quality student and community-partner engagement. Overtaxed faculty are unavailable to support students and community-partners, sometimes defaulting responsibility to already busy frontline community workers.

Research participants also noted evidence that many students were doing most of their placement research online, and that improved websites in community organizations allowed for more self-education and screening. Three community partners noted a substantial decline in call for basic information, by students, when web information was clear and detailed.

Community partners further described student priorities, maturity, ethical behaviour, and realistic expectations, as key areas of concern. Start-up support by faculty for student placements is often promising, however, sometimes wanes as the placement evolves, with primary focus on document deliverables. Research participants discussed the importance of committed and sufficient faculty support in preparing and supporting both students and their respective community partners.

#### *Balanced Effort and Outcome*

Research participants noted that both students and faculty may have unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved in learning partnerships. This is particularly true based on time constraints, coupled with the level of student skill and experience, and the complexity of the desired learning processes and growth. Finally, the level of investment demonstrated by both students and campus partners must be proportionate to the desired outcomes. While all community-engaged learning experiences cannot generate immediate and significant benefits for community-partners, creating capacity deficits for

them through understaffing by campus-partners, influences the nonprofit organization's desire to partner.

#### *Timing and Duration of Placement*

The length and timing of student placements influences the quality of the roles offered students, their ability to see the impact of their actions, and the opportunity to reflect on their learning. When placements are too short or compressed, community organizations are unable to integrate students in work that is both meaningful and useful, especially without consuming the organization's resources.

Research participants described longer placements spanning terms, or ongoing projects extending over a year, to be the most helpful, even if limited to part-time roles. Short, condensed placements of a few hours through to intensive placements of a few weeks were generally seen to be least helpful, and frequently out of proportion in value, to the front-end investment made by the community organization. This is congruent with the findings of Jacoby. (2003); however, length of placement was not seen as the primary factor influencing the quality of the placement by Sandy (2007).

However, some participants welcomed placements of varied lengths, as the diversity of requests aligned with varied and emerging goals and projects. They were more able to integrate larger numbers of students using this approach; however, the time investment by students remained the primary determinate of value to the organization. Community partners also noted the significant resources required to custom design and support many roles because of rigidity and the need to conform to universities and colleges criteria. At the same time, they were often left with front-end screening and

placement costs, which are not in proportion to the service and learning linked to the placement.

Many colleges and universities place students at the same time of year. This challenges community partners to identify enough substantial placement opportunities at the same time. Staggered or atypical scheduling of placements was seen as helpful, as long as planning and consultation occur.

*Just Say No!: The Ability of Community Partners to Decline Placements*

Power and community relations play a significant role in a community partner choosing to decline or end campus–community partnership initiatives, including student placements. The value of community engagement is potentially critical, and some organizations are reluctant to limit potentially valuable relationships. Others relate their continuing involvement in ineffective placements to their larger mission. Some are concerned about negative reaction from entities upon which they are dependant. Power differential in some relationships precludes making situational decisions related to appropriateness and capacity. Real and perceived inequity in power between campus and community partners influences the shape of the relationship (Butin, 2005; Enos & Morton, 2003; Winter et al., 2002). Finally within community organizations, there may be differing opinions about the value of community-engaged learning, which may cause tension between volunteers and staff, as well as difficulty with external partners.

*The Reciprocity Expressed in the Relationship*

Mutual benefit sustains many campus–community relationships. The level of expressed reciprocity between partners influences perception and attitudes towards each other and the value of the partnership. Community partners sometimes find little

recognition for their investment in student placements, when they seek access to other campus resources such as recruitment opportunities, reduced fees, or access to space. At the same time, research participants noted disproportionate investment by the nonprofit community partner, in providing experiential learning opportunities without any financial support. While participants clearly stated they were not seeking direct payment, they did see inequity in supporting direct and indirect infrastructure and enabling costs, much of the time.

#### *Transactional and Transformational Goals and Outcomes*

A notable finding relates to the differences in perception between short- and long-term accrued benefits from the relationship. Community partners described the importance of some transactional outcomes in the midst of longer-term, transformational goals. Research participants acknowledged that there are often no immediate short-term benefits to community partners generated by some student placements. While community partners valued the importance of investment in long-term development of students, and in effective community engagement, they felt they were often measured and held accountable to shorter-term outcomes by their organization and other stakeholders, such as funders. Bushouse (2005) notes the preference by nonprofit community organizations for more short-term transactional outputs, in addition to broader transformational goals. These contribute to timely value and visible outcomes that are required to sustain the resources and capacity to fulfill the community partner's mission.

At the same time, the literature reflects more emphasis on transformational, long-term benefits, such as enhanced civic involvement, systemic impact on societal challenges, and vocational development by students (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Hayes & King,

2006). Nonprofit community partners, like their campus colleagues, value transformational goals related to change, growth, and development. However, many exist in more vulnerable, resource-challenged contexts and require some transactional outcomes to perceive value in the relationship.

*Holistic Institutional Perspective versus Program-Centric Focus*

Participants described inconsistent and program-centric relationships with colleges and universities. Many research participants described excellent relationships with some programs of study. At the same time, they have also experienced competitiveness between programs within the same institution and find faculty's knowledge level, about other campus programs and services other than their own, is low.

Community organizations often find it difficult to get information and referrals to other entities within partnering campuses. This is congruent with the nature of loosely-coupled institutions of higher education described by Jacoby (2003). Community partners value many aspects of their campus partnership beyond the student relationship and expressed frustration in lack of communication and institutional access. Many community partners sought opportunities to engage with the whole organization, not one narrow entity. This is consistent with the relationship focus of nonprofit culture that generates bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000), rather than specialization or bonding social capital sometimes encouraged in academia. Research participants valued access and relationships highly, and cited more positive attitudes towards partnering with more coordinated and open campus partners.

Pigza and Troop (2003) describe three models of relationship and infrastructure prevalent in community engaged learning: concentrated, fragmented, and integrated

(pp. 110–111). Concentrated models of operating involve one way communication from campus to community and little internal communication by the university or college. Access to the campus by the community is barrier-filled and controlled through centralized formal entities. Community partners are not recognized for their assets and knowledge. The fragmented approach offers limited access and two-way communication. Overall respect and interaction are enhanced over the concentrated model; however, most campus units contribute little, and there is no strong leadership or coordination, leading to outcomes that do not match potential. Integrated models encourage internal and external campus communication, facilitated by many strong individual relationships. Campus boundaries are permeable, and campus and community see themselves as equals in a larger community. Shared goal setting and learning are evident and seen as mutually beneficial. Expertise and resources related to community-engaged learning are focused in specific work units in both campus and community, who promote, support, and coordinate throughout the entire system. The models described by community partners span all three approaches; however, integration was the least described, but most desired model.

The integrated approach demonstrated shared commitment by all stakeholders for successful outcomes. While essential partnering resources and expertise are coordinated in some fashion, the philosophy and desire to work together is widespread in the organizations. At the same time, many relationships and network connections keep the partnerships strong. “If momentum for a particular initiative gets road blocked in one area, it can be rerouted elsewhere to accomplish its purpose. Not only do campus units

link community partners, but community partners link campus unit together” (Pigza & Troop, 2003, p. 113).

These infrastructure, integration, and coordination issues support the experiences of research participants in working with campus partners. Some campus partners have developed diverse support and liaison mechanisms, and others who have not. The degree to which effective connections are supported influences the desire of community partners to sustain a working partnership.

#### *Respect and Professionalism*

Participants reported excellent relationships with many campus partners. However, they experienced varied levels of understanding about their own professional experience, training, and credentials, as well as standards and quality control in their organizations. Paradoxically, campus partners often sought community experience for students and deemed it valuable, while not fully respecting their community colleagues outside the institution. Professional respect, including ethical and thoughtful behaviour, was cited as a supporting factor in shaping attitudes that support collaboration.

#### *Investment in Infrastructure*

Infrastructure and appropriate human resources to support students are critical factors in success. Infrastructure to support both the campus–community collaborative relationship generally, and student placements specifically, are scarce or fragmented in the geographic region of study. While several universities and colleges have made significant effort in evolving intermediary resources that support links between campus and community, there is much still to be done. At the same time, community resources in the region, such as Volunteer Centres and other capacity-building or support

organizations, are fragmented and inconsistent in their ability to act as connectors between campus and community. Many organizations struggle with what their role in these endeavours is, or in developing targeted resources useful to students, faculty, and other nonprofit community organizations.

There is considerable untapped potential in developing structural support and resources to sustain and further solidify long-term working relationships both within campuses and the local community. Research participants described the responsibility for sustaining relationships usually falls on pioneering individuals on campus or in individual nonprofit organizations. While this effort often enhances capacity for the community in the end, it also reduces focus on mission and current operations by over-stressed pioneers and sustainers.

Participants noted that community partners require policies, planning, and staff assigned to support placements. Pigza and Troop (2003) describe the importance of infrastructure. In most larger community organizations, the presence of a skilled manager of volunteers allows for information and referral, screening, and orientation required for placements. Those organizations that did not have similar resources were unable to capture the potential capacity generated by student placements. Capacity attracts and generates capacity.

#### *Faculty and Staff Recognition and Support*

Both staff in community organizations and faculty who invest significantly in the quality of effective relationships often go unrecognized and unrewarded, because their efforts are not formally aligned with their roles. Both require support and recognition to sustain their motivation. Research participants described both campus and community

partners, as individuals, who have shown leadership in learning partnerships, but who suffer from lack of support in their own environments.

In academia, research and teaching are priorities. In nonprofit community organizations, service delivery and advocacy are primary. Community-engaged learning may fall outside traditional priorities and reward systems. Boyer (1990) promotes a scholarship of engagement that values collaboration and learning, as do Jackson, Graham, and Maslove (2000). Campus and community organizations must consider the value of community-engaged learning to their respective enterprises and, in turn, enhance outdated reward and support systems that currently undermine community engagement.

### *Summary*

The research findings suggest that multiple factors influence the value generated for community partners, by utilizing student placements. These factors include issues related to awareness, attitudes, roles, recognition, investment, flexibility, resources, infrastructure, expectations, and collaborative skill.

### Scope and Limitation of the Research

A number of factors and limitations influence the findings of this research inquiry. These include, but are not limited to, the requirements of the Royal Roads University Master of Arts in Leadership degree, which was one catalyst for this inquiry. The dimensions of the inquiry were shaped by the requirement for an action research approach, the limited time frame, the potential to assist in a productive manner, and a reasonable leadership challenge to the candidate. Other limitations include the nonprofit community sub-sector involved as research participants, the size and capacity of organizations participating, the location of the research inquiry, the situational nature of

personal experience, the research participant's role in their organization, and researcher skill and bias.

#### *Limited Scope of Sub-Sector*

While a wider invitation was extended to participate in the research inquiry, all research participants worked in human service organizations within the nonprofit sector in community settings. The voluntary, nonprofit sector is large and diverse. Human services is only a subset of the wider sector.

#### *Size and Current Capacity of the Organization*

Research participants represented comparatively large community-based nonprofit organizations (Hall et al., 2005). Most have developed infrastructure and some staff resources to support community-engaged learning. Three organizations, without the same level of capacity and resources, expressed interest in the inquiry, but declined because they perceived themselves to have no capacity to engage students. Many organizations in Canada operate in a similar way (Hall et al., 2005), and their perspectives are not fully represented by the inquiry. Other very large nonprofit organizations operate at an institutional, rather than community-based level (Hall et al., 2005), and the findings of this inquiry may not impact them. These include those nonprofit organizations that operate within public and private sector contexts, such as health regions or corporate initiatives. They exist outside the scope of this study.

#### *The Location of the Research Inquiry*

The research was conducted in a large urban area and the perspectives of research participants may not be congruent with those of individuals who work in regions where university and college resources are not as prevalent (Sandy, 2007). The inquiry was

situated in Canada, and within a region, where support for community-engaged learning may not be as institutionalized as noted in the majority of the literature, which is American (Jacoby, 2003, Canadian Association for Community Service Learning, 2007a).

#### *Personal Experience is Situational*

Research participants draw from their personal experiences related to particular educational institutions and programs. The focus, outcomes, and effectiveness of such diverse experiences vary widely. The personal perspectives of research participants in qualitative action research cannot be attributed to all college and university relationships.

#### *Role in Organization*

The role of the research participant, within their own organization, influences their perspective of value, challenges, cost, and outcomes. Research participants contributed the perspectives of their roles as executive directors, program managers, managers of volunteers, community engagement leaders, and human resource managers, as well as additional experience as board members and students. These diverse view points influence the interpretation of each participant's experience and cannot be attributed to all individuals in the same roles.

#### *Impact of Environment Factors*

Each research participant was further influenced by the capacity and other contextual issues, within their own organization and the world in which it operates. The resources and constraints of each influence the perceived value and challenges of student placements to them.

*Common Definitions*

Universal definitions of community-engaged and service-learning as well as other forms of student service do not exist. The comments of research participants resulted from their interpretations of these activities and may influence the accuracy of their assignment of experiences.

*Researcher Skill and Bias*

As faculty in a college, I may bring biases as a researcher engaged in inquiry about my workplace. At the same time, I work closely with community partners and make volunteer and professional commitments to their organizations and sector. Each perspective may influence the outcome of findings. The applicability of the research findings to wider settings may also be influenced by my skill as a novice researcher.

Summary

The findings of this research inquiry provide some perspectives on the question, “What factors add value to the experience of community-based nonprofit organizations involved in student placements related to community-engaged learning?” as well as related sub-questions. The resulting benefits, challenges, hopes for the future, and suggested changes in practice discussed by the research participants generate factors for further consideration. Limitations of the research inquiry frame the resulting application of these factors.

## CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

This chapter makes recommendations based on the findings described in chapter four and proposes action by the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, universities and colleges, policy makers, funders, and individual community-based nonprofit organizations. Themes for further study are also identified.

## Recommendations

Implications from the conclusions of the research follow a number of themes. These include relationships, consultation, human resources development, infrastructure development, community engagement, and leadership.

*Recommendation #1: Identify, Recognize, and Promote Effective Community-Engaged Learning Partnerships*

Several local and highly-effective campus-community partnerships were described by research participants. Current individual relationships and partnership models generate meaningful and productive collaborative benefits. These should be recognized, and the stories related to them and the lessons learned further told. The stories hold valuable learning, inspiration, and hope for continued development and enhancement of campus–community partnerships. These stories can be powerful tools in communicating the complex and multifaceted dynamics and value of such relationships.

All stakeholders could strengthen understanding of both the achievements and challenges related to community-engaged learning, through use of their internal and external communications. Furthermore, current agency networks, capacity building and intermediary organizations, campus committees, funder coalitions, and other existing

working groups could convene opportunities for dialogue about synergies and barriers related to campus–community learning collaboration.

*Recommendation #2: Universities and Colleges Should Develop and Implement Policy that Supports Effective Consultation and Program Development, Related to Learning Partnerships*

Community partners should be consulted, actively and authentically, when considering curriculum, programming or policy decisions that require involvement by nonprofit community organizations. All research participants noted dissatisfaction with current consultation and planning processes that affect them. Universities and colleges must consider more mechanisms to formally and effectively acknowledge decisions related to programming that impacts community partners. Just as new or revised programs of study are scrutinized for rigor and resources, so too should any community-engagement aspects of the proposed learning approach. Mechanisms such as Advisory Committees, Curriculum Committees, and adhoc dialogues could be enhanced to consider these issues. Most importantly, authentic participation, by community partners in program decisions, must guide the processes used. Curriculum and program development must consider the real costs and benefits to all partners by using a balanced scorecard approach.

*Recommendation #3: Create Institutional Infrastructure, Support and Accountability for Community-Engaged Learning*

Learning institutions require greater organizational intelligence regarding their relationships with community partners. These partnerships not only benefit student learning, they also build important social capital for both the campus and nonprofit

community organizations. These relationships further galvanize community capacity in the widest sense, strengthening the regional community of study. The resources and relationships linked through campus–community collaboration are extensive and inter-related. Research findings illustrate the disconnection between working units in colleges and universities that require more intentional leadership and support of community-engaged learning specifically and campus-community partnerships generally.

Awareness and valuing of the collaborative relationships is a first step in which colleges and universities must invest for better understanding. Research participants universally described lack of awareness and support within campuses about their interdependent relationships with community organizations. Coupled with an institutional, rather than program-centric vision for community engagement and experiential learning, colleges and universities may enhance their relationships by realistically delegating faculty time, supporting communities of practice, funding physical resources, and staffing convening and coordination roles.

At the same time, both campus and community partners should consider shared communications approaches, particularly using technology, that support greater information exchange related to shared learning and capacity-building opportunities. Research participants described face-to-face and online vehicles for enhancing dynamic and two-way communication between stakeholders.

Incremental enhancements could be initiated with existing resources. Community partners could enhance their websites and written communications to provide more detail, allowing for both interest generation and self-screening of prospective students and volunteers. Campus partners could enhance their websites with areas designed for the

community partner's interests and perspectives, in much the same way they customize sites for prospective students. Providing information about a full range of programs and services that connect to community partners provides easier access and a single institutional information site. This approach does not discourage personal conversation, but does provide more efficient access to frequently discussed topics, while allowing for self-service, saving both time and resources.

In countries and communities where formal service-learning partnerships are more evolved, additional infrastructure to support campus–community partnerships exists. When narrowed to actual day-to-day support for community-engaged learning, several mechanisms may be used by universities and colleges to support an integrated approach. These include the institutional development of a centre of expertise and facilitation, as well as multiple gateways to serve learning- and community-engagement opportunities within a college or university (Pigza & Troope, 2003). This dual strategy stresses the value and balance of each component.

In this model, a centralized unit provides broader communication and coordination, while acting as a promoter of community-engaged learning internally and externally. At the same time the unit might also incubate new projects.

The central entity is coupled with a number of decentralized and varied communities of interest throughout the institution and community. These communities of interest, or gateways, develop as opportunities emerge and work relatively independently. They, however, also benefit from expertise, resources, and communication vehicles sustained through the centre of expertise and facilitation infrastructure (Pigza & Troope, 2003).

Because gateways are connected to the campus-wide infrastructure for service-learning, they provide appropriate referrals to students, faculty, staff, and community partners seeking additional service-learning resources, information, and opportunities. Gateways offer initial access to the activities and concepts of service learning, through co-curricular, curricular, and information-exchange programs. (p. 123)

This integrated model supports some autonomy and flexibility, while using the critical mass of coordinated resources and networks. At the same time, it addresses community partner concerns, without over structuring and bureaucratizing the process and infrastructure.

*Recommendation #4: Recognize and Support both Nonprofit Organization Staff and Campus Faculty for their Involvement in Community-Engagement Initiatives*

Individuals and work units involved in efforts to support community-engagement, including student placements, must be recognized as doing real work, congruent with the mission and goals of their respective organizations. Alongside the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of engagement should be rewarded and supported in the academic environment (Boyer, 1990). Jacoby (2003) states,

The institutionalization of service-learning is clearly dependant on the reorganization of the traditional roles of research, teaching, and service to reflect an ethic of community engagement. Defined as they currently are, the promotion and tenure processes generally fail to recognize or reward faculty involvement in service-learning as research, teaching, or service. (p. 319)

In community-based organizations, the value and importance of community-engagement that supports an organization's mission must be valued equally with direct service to clients to sustain capacity (Hall et al., 2003). This recognition should be matched by role clarity and definition, commensurate compensation, adequate support related to time and resources, and flexibility to develop and sustain meaningful collaborative initiatives.

*Recommendation #5: Create Mechanisms and Policy that Recognize Community Access to the College or University and their Related Networks*

Nonprofit community partners see universities and colleges as part of their wider community; just as campus partners view community organizations as their neighbours. Universities and colleges seek increased access to community organizations to achieve their mission. Community partners expect the same from campus partners. Currently, community partners find access to information, shared knowledge, physical resources, and space held by campuses difficult. At the most basic level, community partners require access to resources to effectively support community-engaged learning. These may include faculty time and commitment, lead-time for planning, and resources for student preparation. Secondly, community partners also value other campus resources that assist them in building organizational and community capacity, including social capital. The resources noted in the research data include, but are not limited to, access to student and staff communication vehicles, use of surplus and joint-use space, access to institutional learning resources, use of institutional expertise, and fee reductions or waivers.

Reciprocity in the sharing of resources and access are symbolic in demonstrating collaborative values. Campus partners should consider each relationship with a community organization as a unique experience, consulting with community partners about both their assets and needs.

*Recommendation #6: Identify and Support Long-Term Community Relationships that have the Potential to Create Systemic Change*

While short, focused projects and initiatives are often helpful, long-term relationships, capable of generating systemic change, are also required. Research participants noted their desire to create a greater community legacy through community-engaged learning, not simply as a vehicle to facilitate short-term transactional outcomes. Social change, and other growth valued by both campus and community, takes time, sustained focus, and significant resources. Leveraging of multiple opportunities potentially created through collaboration depends upon longer-term transformational thinking and change strategy. Stakeholders should facilitate more inclusive, flexible, and timely planning processes that allow for creativity and long-term partnership opportunity development.

*Recommendation #7: Convene Dialogue Related to the Coordination and Effectiveness of Local Capacity Building and Intermediary Organizations in Supporting Students and Faculty*

The research participants noted that the geographic region of study has a history of multiple capacity-building and intermediary organizations, engaged in a variety of activities that connect students, community organizations, institutions of higher learning, and other stakeholders. These strengths could be focused and magnified, by exploring the assets and capacity of each and considering more collaboration between them, collectively, in support of students. Both campus and community partners could use this knowledge to promote these organizations and services to students and faculty, reducing the burden on individual community organizations to act extensively as information and

referral agents. These initiatives could potentially strengthen not only student placements, but also career development, volunteer involvement, and other human resource challenges experienced by the nonprofit community (Hall et al., 2003).

At the same time, the continuing quest to further educate the public about the voluntary, nonprofit sector must continue. Without greater public awareness, isolated efforts to raise awareness by targeted groups may fail. Stakeholders must consider multiple strategies to create opportunities for students and faculty to learn more about the voluntary, nonprofit sector.

*Recommendation #8: Make Models, Tools, and Resources Related to Community-Engaged Learning Available to All Stakeholders*

Both campus and community partners may benefit from greater awareness and access to educational resources and tools developed over many years, by practitioners in both community and academic contexts. The mature service-learning movement in the United States, other countries, and the emerging Canadian community-engaged learning movement are rich with models, processes, and tools. At the same time, dynamic partnership models are being created for use in other community collaborations that could inform future campus–community partnership practice. These models could support replication, and resources developed with significant financial support over time could be used or adapted locally.

*Recommendation #9: Support Organizations that Require Capacity-Building Assistance to Strengthen Their Ability to Involve Students and Engage in more Productive Campus-*

*Community Work*

The ability of nonprofit community partners to benefit fully from student involvement in community-engaged learning is directly proportional to the organization's human and infrastructure capacity (Hall et al., 2003). Without the internal structure and staffing to support and capture the benefits of student involvement, under-resourced organizations miss further opportunity to build capacity. Capacity attracts capacity.

Research participants reported positive student involvement when the placements were supported by dedicated staff positions in their organizations who provided support to students as part of their role. When volunteer or student engagement is defined as a core responsibility, rather than supplementary, staff exhibited a more positive view of student involvement. They felt more supported in carrying out their responsibilities in relation to campus–community partnerships. Policy and funding support for dedicated job positions, such as managers of volunteers, and filled by trained and experienced staff, would be helpful to many organizations. These roles support capacity-building required to capture the positive value generated by student involvement and, in turn, build human resources capacity for the community partner.

While supporting capacity-building is largely an issue for policy makers and funders, community-based organizations can also leverage capacity by working together. Collaborating small and unstaffed organizations could partner with complementary community partners to create the critical mass and shared resources to engage students effectively, to the benefit of all involved.

*Recommendation # 10: Develop Partnership and Cross-Cultural Competence*

Partnership and collaboration require a high degree of cross-sectoral and inter-sectoral literacy. Varied goals, coupled with diverse organizational and sectoral cultures, create challenging communication, leading to sometimes ineffective exploration of shared values and goals. Stakeholders must invest adequate time to explore these issues through dialogue and building relationships and creating opportunities to work together incrementally. Process skill development, related to cross-cultural issues, may be helpful in raising awareness of research inquiry findings.

*Recommendation # 11: Link Community-Engaged Learning more Intentionally to Human*

*Resource and Labour Force Planning*

Human resource development is critical to nonprofit community partners, particularly in the currently vulnerable human services sub-sector. Student placements for community-engaged learning purposes connect to many facets of labour force strategies currently being developed provincially and nationally in support of the voluntary, nonprofit sector. Community-engaged learning also illustrates one method of shared capacity building support, as defined by the Alberta Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Initiative (2008). Campus and community partners could be intentional about considering how student placements, utilizing diverse forms of community-engaged learning, support these strategies. Based on the research conclusions, I believe that public and other funder support for many of the resource mechanisms and processes suggested in research findings would be congruent with many nonprofit sector labour force development goals.

At the same time, campus and nonprofit community partners should more intentionally reflect on how curriculum and current relationships support their current

human resources planning. Curriculum goals, aligned realistically with community partnerships, would support this focus. More in-depth human resources policy development and planning by community organizations and related to student involvement, would also be helpful, based on the experiences of many research participants.

*Recommendation #12: Change and Collaborative Leadership*

Collaborative initiatives, particularly those as complex as campus–community partnerships, require leadership at many levels. Personal leadership, illustrated by the initiative taken by many community and campus partners as individual pioneers, innovators, and sustainers, is critical. Strength in partnerships continues to be fuelled by individuals rather than organizations, especially in the absence of institutionalized policy and infrastructure. Sustainability and growth cannot be achieved through these efforts alone.

Leadership, through governance and in senior management, is also key in aligning organizational mission, goals, and operations. Academic leaders, committed to community-engaged learning, must be equally committed to equity in partnerships and the scholarship of engagement. Nonprofit, community organization governors and managers must also value and implement parallel principles through investment in infrastructure to support student involvement, campus–community partnerships, and other forms of related community engagement. Community partners must skilfully balance their needs and the assets required for current operation, with investment in future longer-term outcomes.

Visionary leadership by other stakeholders, including funders and other policy makers, also influences the likely evolution of community-engaged learning to its full potential. Like other approaches to social change and personal growth, community-engaged learning is difficult to measure and quantify. Investment in policies and funding that support capacity-building initiatives to support this activity are even more challenging to assess. Willingness to experiment, take risks, and consider long-term outcomes is critical in supporting the evolution of community-engaged learning as an approach to sustaining and further developing nonprofit organizations and community.

#### Implications for Future Research

This study, using action research and narrative inquiry, offers opportunities for both the researcher and research participants to consider future exploration into related issues. These include further inquiry into community-engaged learning by younger students, infrastructure to support learning partnerships, the long-term connection between student involvement and community engagement, and finally, models of institutionalizing many of the concepts discussed in this research inquiry.

#### *The Impact of Community-Engaged Learning in the K–12 Education System*

The experience of students involved in community-engaged learning earlier in their education may influence their attitudes and participation in university and college service-learning and other forms of community involvement. If so, how can early student experiences be enhanced to leverage the outcomes of future community-engaged learning experiences in higher education? At the same time, how do community organizations' experiences with the K–12 system influence their desire and ability to host students from colleges and universities?

*Effective Mechanisms for Campus–Community Communication*

As colleges, universities, and many community-based organizations become larger, what forms and infrastructure for communication are most effective? What tools and processes encourage effective dialogue between individuals and groups engaged in collaborative learning partnerships?

*Longitudinal Studies of Community Engagement Outcomes Related to Campus–Community Learning Partnerships*

The findings of this research emphasize the social and network capital generated by campus–community partnerships. The findings also support the perception that student placements generate opportunities for ongoing and future community engagement, such as advocacy, volunteering, donating, and other forms of support and involvement. While this notion would seem to be primarily relevant to the community-partner, campus partners increasingly are concerned about similar issues. Does investment in campus–community partnership support yield the anticipated community-engagement benefits for both campus and community organizations over time?

*Institutionalization of Community-Engaged Learning*

Much of the literature, as well as research findings, support greater institutionalization of community-engaged learning to ensure adequate resourcing, policy development, and other forms of support. At the same time, other perspectives suggest over institutionalization may be detrimental and that self-organizing may be more appropriate (Wheatley & Kelner-Rogers, 1998). What are the critical aspects of formalizing such learning partnerships, and what factors contribute to effective levels of institutionalization?

### Implications for Sponsoring Organization

The Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organization (ECVO) plays a leadership role in exploring crosscutting issues that affect a wide range of Edmonton region nonprofit community-based organizations. In the organization's role related to education and advocacy, ECVO could convene dialogues to explore the research inquiry question further. These dialogues may be a catalyst for developing additional local strategies to more fully develop the potential of community-engaged learning partnerships. The organization is currently playing a leadership role in developing labour force strategies in several realms and in advocating for enhanced awareness and working relationships with government. A similar strategy, using multiple approaches such as conference and professional development training, shared visioning and planning, exchanges, learning circles, and communities of practice, could be a starting point. Each would require implementation at multiple decision points.

At the same time, ECVO should exercise caution in representing the sector universally. Nonprofit sub-sectors and their respective campus partners operate in diverse ways and with varying levels of formality. ECVO should be sensitive to the dynamics of current and potential campus–community partnerships, primarily acting as a convener. While several campus partners have demonstrated leadership in hosting dialogues about related issues, the community voice has not been strongly represented. ECVO might consider ways to compliment these initiatives, while ensuring greater focus on community perspectives.

This chapter has suggested recommendations resulting from research findings related to factors that influence nonprofit community-based organizations and their desire

to involve college and university students. These organizational and stakeholder level recommendations address issues related to relationships, reciprocity, infrastructure, and leadership issues.

## CHAPTER SIX: LESSONS LEARNED

This research inquiry was completed with the support and guidance of many individuals and the cumulative experience, reflection, and knowledge generated from my Royal Roads University MA Leadership experience journey. I learned much from the opportunity to follow my curiosity, while exploring issues I hoped would be meaningful to practice in the two worlds in which I work: the voluntary, nonprofit sector and higher education. My resulting learning relates to self-awareness, research, learning, and leadership.

### The Value of Dialogue

Both the research inquiry process and the intense learning experience in the MA Leadership program reinforced the pleasure and power of dialogue for me. I broadened my perspectives significantly through conversations, some facilitated, but many spontaneous. I was reminded of the importance of committing time and energy to discussion. In many organizational cultures dialogue is no longer seen as valuable and does not take priority in hectic, time-challenged leadership roles. Margaret Wheatley (2002) describes the antithesis well:

Even among friends, starting a conversation can take courage. But conversation also gives courage. Thinking together, deciding what actions to take, more of us become bold. And we become wiser about where to use our courage. As we learn from each other's experiences and interpretations, we see the issue in richer detail. We understand more of the dynamics that have created it. With this clarity we know what actions to take and where we might have the most influence. We also know when not to act, when right timing means doing nothing. (p. 26)

### Learning through Reflection

Coupled with dialogue, reflexive learning and leadership practice have gained significant meaning for me. In lives filled with rush and multiple commitments, it is easy

to lose the most significant aspect of experience and never reap the full potential of learning. The action research process mirrored the experiential learning process (Kolb, 1984) that is central to my role as an educator, learner, and leader. The research process offered many opportunities to integrate deep reflection, both individually and collectively, yielding considerable learning. Reflexive practice that encourages meaning making takes time, effort, and discipline. It does not occur without practice and priority. This research experience motivated me to be more intentional about reflexive practice and rekindle greater depth in my critical thinking about both teaching and leadership.

#### When to Establish Framework

During my studies at Royal Roads University, I was reminded of my perceiving nature and my challenge in limiting how much data I gather from the environment around me. To manage this tendency I often create frameworks or visual structures to house and organize data. The research process challenged me to assess when structure was critical to framing process and content—and when it was a barrier to openness and the ongoing inquiry purpose. The following poem illustrates my learning about suspending my own information organization strategies, so as not to prematurely limit possibility or make assumptions.

don't establish the boundaries first,  
 the squares, triangles,  
 boxes of preconceived possibility,  
 and then pour  
 life into them, trimming  
 off left over edges,  
 ending potential. (Ammons, as cited in Wheatley, 2002, p. 116)

### Creating Space

In addition to prematurely structuring ideas, I am aware of the need to create more space for others to contribute to my reflection and learning. While schedules and timing were often barriers to more collaborative thinking, so too was my need for control. I have learned the value of creating more space both metaphorically and in reality, for others to challenge and enrich my thought process. At the same time, I have learned that most people will not enter that space without invitation, something I need to extend more regularly.

### Small Steps Get You There

The research process, for a novice, can be daunting and filled with overwhelming procedures and detail. As a person often focused on the whole, rather than the parts, a two-year experience juxtaposing detail and context; as well as content and process, was quite a workout. My learning was that taking small steps to maintain momentum eventually got me to my goals. My preferred work style involves gathering data, long periods of reflection, and rapid creation of a product. While I could use this approach on sections of the research, it was largely ineffective in accomplishing such a large project. The action research approach gave me latitude to focus on relationships and relevance, while trusting the research process structure to act as a touchstone in reconnecting the parts when I feared loss of context. I also learned to revisit the overall purpose of the research process and methodology, rather than get lost in isolated details. By regularly considering the overall principles that guide effective and ethical research, I was better able to understand the role of the detail and value it.

### Complexity

Examining issues that connect several system and organizational cultures, as well considering the multiple factors that influence each, is complex. So too are the dynamics of maintaining trust and relevance in two worlds, academia and community, at the same time. While the outcomes of this inquiry often looked simple and obvious on the surface, they often involved chaotic and confusing undertones. I learned to shift from one to the other not assuming simplicity, but at the same time trying not to get lost in complexity and lose focus. The elegance of both the complexity and the simplicity kept me motivated and curious throughout the research process, providing both opportunity and closure as I worked through the project.

### Work in Ways Congruent with Who You Are

Completing the research project, while remaining true to my values and life priorities, was often challenging. While the work was often difficult and required significant discipline, it was possible to honour what is important to me in life. I learned that clarity in my beliefs guided me in creating equitable and satisfying use of my time and energy. I listened carefully and watched other learners with interest, gleaning what learning I could from their approaches. In the end, I knew I had to respect my own rhythms and patterns of gathering, sorting and synthesizing ideas and information. At the same time, it was remarkable to be exposed to the diversity of thought processes and perspectives of research participants, scholarly literature, faculty, and my fellow learners.

### It Is Never Too Late

I always knew I would continue my formal education, in the midst of my life learning. However a number of meaningful expeditions postponed that trip. As middle

age dawned, and any career motivation to add credentials faded, I never lost the vision that further education for me would be about reflection on my life to date. I had opened the door to graduate studies several times before and knew the time or place were not right. With the luxury of time and focus, I explored options until I found this opportunity to consider leadership in the fullest sense, and I used action research to consider issues important to me. I would encourage prospective students and researchers to stay the course, until they find an educational experience and research approach that suits them. It is never too late to be curious.

#### The Power of Narrative

While considering research methodology, I experimented with narrative inquiry as part of a student group project. While other methodologies were interesting, our group experience left me motivated to use narrative to more fully surface experiences of research participants. This approach seemed most relevant to my research project purpose. I considered narrative in both the inquiry and reporting of findings, but discarded the idea several times. I was concerned that findings would not be taken seriously in a more traditional research environment, or be unfamiliar to audiences I hoped to engage in the research process. In retrospect, I believe using this approach gave voice to the perspectives of nonprofit community organizations and their staff, in a way that other methods would not have captured. I am glad I chose this approach and had the courage of my own convictions.

#### Speaking for Others

Documenting the experiences and perceptions of others accurately, with only partial awareness of one's own biases, viewpoint, and filters, is a challenge. The trust

research participants exhibit in sharing their thoughts, particularly in narrative, warrants significant ethical and logistical sensitivity. I was constantly challenged to question my own biases and perception and separate them from those of the research participants. At the end of this inquiry, I believe I was only partially successful in this endeavour. Where possible, I consulted with research participants, my supervisor, my sponsoring organization, and the literature to assess the accuracy of my perceptions.

#### Learning as Collaboration

My primary regret in completing this inquiry is the limited opportunity I created for more active collaboration with others in the process. My sponsor, supervisor, colleagues, and research participants were all generous in their time and commitment. In an attempt not to consume community-partner resources, congruent with the theme of the inquiry, I may have under-utilized my relationship with them as co-investigators. I believe the findings and conclusions of the inquiry would be richer had I actively engaged them more. At the same time, I am aware that most co-investigators invested what they could, and my hope is that the research process encourages ongoing dialogue and relationships.

#### Concluding Comments

This research inquiry, supported by the learning opportunities generated by the Royal Roads University MA Leadership program and many years of related career and life experience, contributed to my understanding of both leadership and learning. The research undertaken allowed me to formally study an issue I have been interested in for several decades. My hope is that the process, findings, and recommendations contribute

to the capacity of community-based nonprofit organizations and to the learning and practice of all stakeholders.

## REFERENCES

- Alexander, J., Weiner, B., Metzger, M., Shortell, S., Bazzoli, G., Hasnain-Wynia, R., et al. (2003). Sustainability of collaborative capacity in community health partnerships. *Medical Care Research and Review*, *60*, 130. Retrieved December 2, 2007, from [http://mcr.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/60/4\\_suppl/130S](http://mcr.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/60/4_suppl/130S)
- Alberta Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Initiative. (2008). *Why is it important for the government of Alberta and the nonprofit voluntary sector to work together?* Retrieved March 6, 2008, from [http://www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/documents/lcvss/2\\_sided\\_glossy.pdf](http://www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/documents/lcvss/2_sided_glossy.pdf)
- Armistead, C., Pettigrew, P., & Aves, S. (2007). Exploring leadership in multi-sectoral partnerships. *Leadership*, *3*, 211. Retrieved October 26, 2007, from Sage Journals Online database.
- Baum, H. (2000). Fantasies and realities in university–community partnerships. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, *20*, 234. Retrieved December 28, 2007, from Sage Journals Online database.
- Bartczak, L. (Ed). (2005). *Funder's guide to organizational assessment: Tools, processes, and their use in building capacity*. St. Paul, MN: Fieldstone Alliance.
- Berg, B. L. (2007). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (6th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Block, P. (2000). *Flawless consulting: A guide to getting your expertise used* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Blumenthal, B. (2003). *Investing in capacity building*. New York: The Foundation Centre.
- Bolman, L., & Deal, T. (2003). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice and leadership* (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey- Bass.
- Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities for the professoriate*. Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Breunig, M. (2005). Turning experiential education and critical pedagogy theory into praxis. *Journal of Experiential Education*, *28*(2), 106–122.
- Bushouse, B. (2005). Community nonprofit organizations and service-learning: Resource constraints to building partnerships with universities. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *12*(1), 32-40.

- Bringle, R. D., & Hatcher, J. (2002). Campus-community partnerships: The terms of engagement [Electronic version]. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 58(3), 503–516. Retrieved January 24, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.
- Butin, D. (2005). *Service-learning in higher education: Critical issues and directions*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Canadian Association for Community Service-Learning. (2007a). *Research opportunities*. Retrieved April 15, 2007, from [http://www.communityservicelearning.ca/en/research\\_opportunities.cfm](http://www.communityservicelearning.ca/en/research_opportunities.cfm)
- Canadian Association for Community Service-Learning. (2007b). *What is community service learning?* Retrieved April 15, 2007, from [http://www.communityservicelearning.ca/en/welcome\\_what\\_is.cfm](http://www.communityservicelearning.ca/en/welcome_what_is.cfm)
- Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. (1998). *Tri-council policy statement: Ethical conduct for research involving humans* (with 2000, 2002 and 2005 amendments). Retrieved April 11, 2007, from <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/english/policystatement/policystatement.cfm>
- Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. (2007). *Tri-Council policy statement: Integrity in research and scholarship*. Retrieved April 11, 2007, from [http://www.nserc.gc.ca/professors\\_e.asp?nav=profnav&lbi=p9](http://www.nserc.gc.ca/professors_e.asp?nav=profnav&lbi=p9)
- Conle, C. (2007). Narrative inquiry: research tool and medium for professional development. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 23(1), 49–63. Retrieved May 24, 2007, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/713667262>
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F.M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Cruz, N. I., & Giles, D. E. (2000). Where's the community in service-learning research? [Abstract]. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning* (Special Issue). Retrieved January 30, 2007, from <http://www.umich.edu/~mjcs/volumes/2000abstracts.html>
- Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations. (2007a). *ECVO and community service-learning*. Retrieved January 10, 2007, from <http://www.ecvo.ca/CSLintro.htm>
- Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations. (2007b). *Our mandate*. Retrieved April 15, 2007, from <http://www.ecvo.ca/aboutus.htm>

- Edwards, B., & Foley, M. (1998). Civil society and social capital beyond Putnam. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 42(1), 124–139. Retrieved January 15, 2008, from Sage Journals Online database.
- Edwards, B., Mooney, L., & Heald, C. (2001). Who is being served? The impact of student volunteering on community organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 30(3), 444–461. Retrieved March 13, 2007, from EBSCOhost database.
- El Ansari, W. & Phillips, C. (2004). The costs and benefits to participants in community partnerships: A paradox. *Health Promotion Practice*, 5(1), 35–48. Retrieved December 2, 2007, from <http://hpp.sagepub/cgi/content/abstract/5/1/35>
- Enos, S., & Morton, K. (2003). Developing a theory and practice of campus-community partnerships. In B. Jacoby (Ed.), *Building partnerships for service-learning* (pp. 20–41). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fisher, I., & Huff Wilson, S. (2003). Partnerships with students. In B. Jacoby (Ed.), *Building partnerships for service-learning* (pp. 85-105). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Floyd, A. (2007). Collaborative avenues to build capacity. In P. Stone Motes & P. McCartt Hess (Eds.), *Collaborating with community-based organizations through consultation and technical assistance* (pp. 81–115). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Foster, M., Meinard, A., & Berger, I. (2003, November). The role of social capital: Bridging, bonding or both? *Center for Voluntary Sector Studies Working Paper Series No. 22*. Toronto, ON, Canada: Ryerson University.
- Gass, M. (2005). Comprehending the value structures influencing significance and power behind experiential education research. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 27(3), 286–296.
- Gelmon, S. (2003). Assessment as a means of building service- learning partnerships. In B. Jacoby (Ed.), *Building partnerships for service-learning* (pp. 42–64). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (3rd ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Goldenberg, M. (2006). *Building blocks for strong communities*. Retrieved May 12, 2007, from [http://nonprofitscan.imaginecanada.ca/files/en/misc/building\\_blocks\\_for\\_strong\\_communities\\_small\\_and\\_medium\\_sized\\_enterprises.pdf](http://nonprofitscan.imaginecanada.ca/files/en/misc/building_blocks_for_strong_communities_small_and_medium_sized_enterprises.pdf)

- Graff, L. (2006). *Volunteering and mandatory community service: A discussion paper*. Ottawa, ON, Canada: Volunteer Canada.
- Grant MacEwan College. (2006). *Ethical review of research with human participants*. Retrieved April 15, 2007, from [http://www.macewan.ca/web/services/board\\_gov/about/DetailsPage.cfm?id=1030](http://www.macewan.ca/web/services/board_gov/about/DetailsPage.cfm?id=1030)
- Greenberg, J., Howard, D., & Desmond, S. (2003). A community-campus partnership for health. *Health Promotion Practitioner*, 4, 393. Retrieved December 28, 2007, from <http://hpp.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/4/4/393>
- Gronski, R., & Pigg, K. (2000) University and community collaboration: Experiential leaning in human services. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 43(5), 781–792.
- Hall, M., Lasby, D., Gunulka, G., & Tryon, C. (2000). *Caring Canadians, involved Canadians: The Canadian survey of giving, volunteering and participating*. Ottawa, ON, Canada: Statistics Canada.
- Hall, M., Andrukow, A., Barr, C., de Wit, M., Embuldenya, D., Jolin, L., et al. (2003). *The capacity to serve: A qualitative study of the challenges facing Canada's voluntary and nonprofit organizations*. Retrieved January 30, 2007, from [http://www.nonprofitscan.ca/Files/nsnvo/capacity\\_to\\_serve.pdf](http://www.nonprofitscan.ca/Files/nsnvo/capacity_to_serve.pdf)
- Hall, M. H., de Wit, M. L., Lasby, D., McIver, D., Evers, T., Johnston, C., et al. (2005). *Cornerstones of community: Highlights of the national survey of non-profit and voluntary organizations* (rev. ed.). Retrieved April 15, 2007, from [http://www.nonprofitscan.ca/pdf/NSNVO\\_Report\\_English.pdf](http://www.nonprofitscan.ca/pdf/NSNVO_Report_English.pdf)
- Hayes, E., & King, C. (2006). *Community service-learning in Canada: A scan of the field*. Retrieved January 15, 2007, from <http://www.communityservicelearning.ca>
- Holland, B. (2001). A comprehensive model for assessing service-learning and community-university partnerships. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 2001(114), 51–60.
- Ilsley, P. (1990). *Enhancing the volunteer experience: New insights on strengthening volunteer participation, learning, and commitment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Jackson, E., Graham, K., & Maslove, A. (2000). Enhancing university-community partnerships: Retooling the academy for more effective engagement in civil society. *Education Through Partnership*, 14(2), 16–30.
- Jacoby, B. (Ed.). (2003). *Building partnerships for service-learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Jacoby, B., Albert, G., Bucco, D., Busch, J., Enos, S., Fisher, I., et al. (1996). *Service-learning in higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Kibbe, B., Canales, J., Enwright, K., Cortes Culwell, A., Sobrato Sonsim, L. Sperm, S. K. et al. (2004). *Funding effectiveness: Lessons in building nonprofit capacity*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Kidd, J. (2005). *Conversations about capacity building*. Edmonton, AB, Canada: The Muttart Foundation.
- Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Lashby, D. (2004). *The volunteer spirit in Canada: Motivations and barriers*. Retrieved February 8, 2007, from [http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca/pdf/reports/Volunteer\\_Spirit.pdf](http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca/pdf/reports/Volunteer_Spirit.pdf)
- Leiderman, S., Furco, A., Zapf, J., & Goss, M. (2003). *Building partnerships with college campuses: Community perspectives*. Washington, DC: Council of Independent Colleges.
- Marullo, S., & Edwards, B. (2000). From charity to justice: The potential for university-community partnerships and social change. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 43(5), 895–912. Retrieved January 3, 2008 from Sage Publications database.
- Mattessich, P. W. & Monsey, B. R. (1992). *Collaboration: What makes it work*. St. Paul, MN: Wilder Foundation.
- Maurrasse, D. J. (2002). Higher education- community partnerships: Assessing Progress in the Field. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 31, 131. Retrieved March 25, 2007, from Sage Publication database.
- McConnell Foundation. (2007). *McConnell Foundation initiatives: University-based community service-learning program*. Retrieved February 15, 2007, from <http://www.mccconnellfoundation.ca/default.aspx?page=60>
- McHugh Engstrom, C. (2003). Developing collaborative student affairs- academic affairs partnerships for service-learning. In B. Jacoby (Ed.), *Building partnerships for service-learning* (pp. 65–84). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- McKinsey & Co. (2001). *Effective capacity building in nonprofit organizations*. Retrieved February 12, 2008, from <http://vpppartners.org/learning/reports/capacity/capacity.html>
- Meinard, A. (2006). Managing the human dimension in nonprofit organizations: Paid staff and volunteers. In V. Murray (Ed.), *Management of nonprofit organizations in Canada* (pp. 387–419). Markham, ON, Canada: LexisNexis Canada.
- Meneghetti, M. (1995). Motivating people to volunteer their services. In T. D. Connor (Ed.), *The volunteer management handbook* (pp. 12–35). New York: Wiley.

- Morton, K., & Saltmarsh, J. (1997). Addams, Day, and Dewey: The emergence of community service-learning in American culture. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning*, 4, 137-139.
- Mundel, K., & Schugurensky, D. (2005). *Volunteer's informal learning in community-based organizations: On individual experience and collective reflection*. Paper presented at the 2005 National Conference On-Line Proceedings. Retrieved February 1, 2008, from [www.oise.utoronto.ca/CASAE/cnf2005/2005onlineProceedings/CAS2005Pro-M%FCndel.pdf](http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/CASAE/cnf2005/2005onlineProceedings/CAS2005Pro-M%FCndel.pdf)
- Ostrander, S. A. (2004). Democracy, civic participation, and the university: A comparative study of civic engagement on five campuses. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 33, 74. Retrieved March 17, 2007, from Sage Publication database.
- Palys, T. (2003). *Research decisions: Quantitative and qualitative perspectives*. Scarborough, ON, Canada: Nelson.
- Pigza, J., & Troppe, M. (2003). Developing an infrastructure for service-learning and community engagement. In B. Jacoby (Ed.), *Building partnerships for service-learning* (pp. 106–130). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Touchstone.
- Ramaley, J. (2000). Embracing civic responsibility. In *Campus compact reader* (pp. 1–5). Providence, RI: Campus Compact.
- Royal Roads University. (2007). *Research ethics policy*. Retrieved April 5, 2007, from Research at RRU Web site: <http://www.royalroads.ca/research/ethical-reviews/ethics-policy.htm>
- Sandy, M. (2007). *Community voices: A California Campus Compact study on partnerships*. San Francisco: Campus Compact.
- Sandy, M., & Holland, B. (2006). Different worlds and common ground: Community partner perspectives on campus-community partnerships. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning*, 13(1), 30–43.
- Seel, K. (2006). *Boundary spanning: A grounded theory of sustainability in Canada's nonprofit sector*. Doctoral thesis, University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Retrieved March 1, 2008, from Mt Royal College Web site: [http://www.mtroyal.ab.ca/nonprofitinstitute/Boundary\\_Spanning\\_PhD\\_Thesis\\_Keith\\_Seel.pdf](http://www.mtroyal.ab.ca/nonprofitinstitute/Boundary_Spanning_PhD_Thesis_Keith_Seel.pdf)
- Schein, E. (2004). *Organizational culture and leadership* (3rd ed.). New York: Wiley.

- Shefner, J., & Cobb, D. (2002). Hierarchy and partnership in New Orleans. *Qualitative Sociology*, 25(2), 273–297. Retrieved March 16, 2007, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Statistics Canada. (2003). *National survey of nonprofit and voluntary sector organizations*. Retrieved August 13, 2007, from [www.nonprofitscan.ca](http://www.nonprofitscan.ca)
- Statistics Canada. (2004). *Canadian survey of giving and volunteering*. Retrieved January 8, 2007, from <http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca>
- Stringer, E. T. (1999). *Action research* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Torres, J. (Ed.). (2000). *Benchmarks for campus/community partnerships*. Providence, RI: Campus Compact.
- University of Alberta. (2006). *Community service-learning program annual evaluation report: Fall 2005–Winter 2006*. Available from <http://www.ecvo.ca/CSLintro.htm>
- Vickers, M., Harris, C., & McCarthy, F. (2004). University-community engagement: Exploring service-learning options within the practicum [Electronic version]. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 32(2), 129–141. Retrieved February 5, 2008, from <http://tls.vu.edu.au/SCS/LiW/Docs/Vickers.pdf>
- Ward, K., & Wolf-Wendel, L. (2000) Community-centered service learning: Moving from doing for to doing with. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 43, 767–780. Retrieved March 27, 2007, from Sage Journals Online database.
- Weiss, E., Miller-Anderson, R., & Lasker, R. (2002). Making the most of collaboration: Exploring the relationship between partnership synergy and partnership functioning. *Health Education and Behavior*, 29, 683. Retrieved December 2, 2007, from <http://heb.sagepub.com>
- Westley, F., Zimmerman, B., & Quinn Patton, M. (2006). *Getting to maybe*. Toronto, ON, Canada: Random House Canada.
- Wheatley, M. (2002). *Turning to one another: Simple conversations to restore hope in the future*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Wheatley, M. (2005). *Finding our way: Leadership for uncertain times*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Wheatley, M., & Kellner-Rogers, M. (1998). *The promise and paradox of community*. Retrieved May 9, 2007, from <http://www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/paradox.html>

Winter, A., Wiseman, J., & Muirhead, B. (2002). *Beyond rhetoric: University-community engagement in Victoria*. Australia: Creative Commons. Available from <http://www.eidos.org.au>

Worrall, L. (2007). Asking the community: A case study of community partner perspectives [Abstract]. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning*, 14(1).

## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The purpose of the interview is to learn about the experiences you have had individually and as an organization, in hosting university and college students, and their learning institution, as community-engaged learning partners.

### Contextual Questions

Please provide the following information to provide organizational background and contextual information.

- What is your job role in the nonprofit organization?
- How many years of combined experience, do you personally have in hosting university and college students? Please include experience in other organizations you have previously worked in.
- What is the annual budget of your current organization?
- How many full time equivalent (FTE) employees work in your organization?
- How many university and college students does your organization annually place?
- Does your organization place students in the K-12 education system?
- How many volunteers of all ages, does your organization actively involve annually?

### The Narrative Inquiry

- Tell me about your experiences with hosting students involved in community-engaged learning.

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

My name is Wendy MacDonald, and this research project is part of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by telephoning Dr. Gerry Nixon, Director of the School of Leadership Studies at XXXXX.

This document constitutes an agreement to participate in my research project, the purpose of which is to learn more about factors that influence the value and costs of service-learning initiatives to nonprofit organizations involved in partnerships with Colleges and Universities. The specific research question is “How can service-learning collaborations enhance value and capacity for nonprofit organizations involved as community partners?” It is anticipated that the research will assist in generating awareness and informing practice in service learning partnerships. For the purpose of this study, service-learning initiatives include all community-based educational student placements required by Colleges and Universities for the purposes of learning and assessment. The sponsor of my research is the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (ECVO).

An invitation to participate was extended to all member organizations of ECVO. ECVO distributed the requests for participation through their membership contact list. Seven individuals were chosen from organizational staff who responded to the invitation. You, and other research participants, were chosen to insure diversity of organization size and purpose, as well depth and scope of experience in hosting students.

The research will consist of individual interviews each lasting approximately one hour, and a focus group of one and a half hours in duration held at a later date.

The anticipated research questions I propose to explore are:

In the Interviews:

- Tell me about your experiences with hosting students involved in service-learning.
- Clarifying questions emerging from your discussion

In the Focus Groups:

Themes and questions used will emerge from the interviews, but might include:

- What do you, as a nonprofit community partner, value in your service-learning involvement with Colleges and Universities?
- What challenges de-value the potential benefits of service-learning partnerships to your organization as a nonprofit community partner?
- What factors do you think contribute to organizational capacity building for the nonprofit community partners as a result of service-learning involvement?
- How might each stakeholder in service-learning initiatives consider these factors in their practice?

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master of Arts in Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (ECVO), and using the results to develop presentations, journal articles and educational materials.

Information from interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded and transcribed in hand-written or electronic format and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. Anonymous quotations may also be used. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. Participants will be identified by code names in data collection and storage. All data linked to any identifying information will only be accessed by the researcher. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential

and stored in a secure format for twelve months after the publication of the project report, before being destroyed using appropriate standards and methods. Participants in focus groups will be asked to respect the confidentiality of the information discussed in the session, however there is the potential to lose confidentiality within a group setting.

A copy of the final report will be published. A copy will be housed at Royal Roads University, available online through UMI/ Proquest and the Theses Canada portal and will be publicly accessible. Access and distribution will be unrestricted.

I am a Faculty member of Grant MacEwan College. To avoid conflict of interest I will disqualify from the research, any current students studying within the program(s) I am affiliated with, as well as any faculty or staff reporting to me, or funders supporting current initiatives I manage, during the duration of the study.

The interviews will be held at XXXX on XXXX, XX-XXpm.

The focus groups will be held at XXX on XXX from XXX to XXX pm

I have attached a map and parking instruction for each session.

You are not compelled to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Any information you have shared with me, will be destroyed and not included in the research findings.

Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

By signing this letter, you give free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Name: (Please Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

October 1, 2007

I would like to invite your organization to be part of a research project that I am conducting. **The research is about the experience nonprofit, community organizations have when they work with Colleges and Universities in hosting students for service-learning purposes.** In most cases the Executive Director, Manager of Volunteers or a Program Manager would be an appropriate representative depending upon the structure of your organization. Please forward this request to others in your organization if more appropriate.

This project is part of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership degree, at Royal Roads University and my credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by telephoning Dr. Gerry Nixon, Director of the School of Leadership Studies at (xxx) xxx-xxxx in Victoria, BC.

The purpose of my research project is to learn more about factors that influence the value and costs of service-learning initiatives to nonprofit organizations engaged in partnerships with Colleges and Universities. The specific research question is “How can service-learning collaborations enhance value and capacity for nonprofit organizations involved as community partners?” I hope that that the research will assist in generating awareness and informing practice in service learning and other community-engaged learning partnerships. For the purpose of this study, service-learning initiatives include community-based educational student placements required by Colleges and Universities for the purposes of learning and assessment. The sponsor of my research is the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (ECVO).

The research will consist of interviews with individuals, each lasting approximately one hour ((held at your convenience October 24 – 31), and a focus group of one and a half hours in duration, involving the same participants (mid November). Your participation would occur October through December 2007, although I may wish to contact you for clarification after that period. If you indicate interest in participating and qualify, you will be involved in both an interview and a focus group. Five to seven participants will be chosen to participate in the research, insuring depth and diversity of experience in service-learning/ student placement initiatives with Universities and Colleges. The time associated with participation would be approximately three to five hours in total, including receiving administrative communication and debriefing the experience. As the researcher I will be conducting the interviews and focus groups.

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment of a Master of Arts in Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (ECVO) and using the results to develop presentations, journal articles and educational materials. I will offer participants an opportunity to debrief their experience as a research participant, with me, by phone or in writing, near the end of the research project. I will also review the accuracy of my summation of interview data with interview participants. Research findings will be shared with the participants in summary.

Information from interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded and transcribed in hand-written or electronic format and, where appropriate, summarized in anonymous format in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand.

Participants will be identified by a pseudonym in data collection and storage. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential and stored in a secure format for twelve months, before being destroyed using appropriate standards and methods. Participants in focus groups will be asked to respect the confidentiality of the information discussed in the session, but reminded that group confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

I am a Faculty member of Grant MacEwan College. To avoid conflict of interest I will disqualify from the research, any current students studying within the program(s) I am affiliated with, as well as any faculty or staff reporting to me, or funders supporting current initiatives I manage, during the duration of the study.

You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice and any information you have shared with me will be destroyed. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

Please feel free to contact me should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes. **If you would like to participate in my research project, please contact me by**

**October 18, 2007 at:**

**Email:** [xxxxxxx](mailto:xxxxxxx)

**Telephone:** (B) xxx- xxx-xxxx

I appreciate your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

Wendy L. MacDonald

APPENDIX D: ELECTRONIC MAIL FOLLOW UP INVITATION

Earlier in October your organization received an invitation to participate in a research project designed to learn more about **how College/ University student placements in nonprofit organizations impact the capacity of the nonprofit organization**. The research is part of my requirement for completing a Master of Arts in Leadership at Royal Roads University. I hope this research will help inform understanding of learning partnerships between students, nonprofits, and Colleges/ Universities, and help partners develop the full potential of such relationships.

The Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (ECVO) is my sponsor and all organizational members of ECVO were invited to voluntarily participate in the research if they have hosted students and wish to participate. In summary, individuals interested in participating would participate in a one hour interview the week of October 24 – 31, 2007 and a one and a half hour focus group in mid November. I am studying the experiences of individuals who have hosted or arranged for student placements. The individual may have experience from several settings, not just your own. In most cases an Executive Director, Manager of Volunteer Services or Program Manager would be an appropriate contact, depending upon the structure of your organization.

I have attached a copy of the original letter of invitation. Please have interested individuals contact me by Thursday, October 18, 2007 if your organization is able to participate. I appreciate the commitment involved and thank you for your consideration of my request.

I can be reached at: (xxx) xxx-xxxx, wendy.macdonald@rxxxxx.xx  
Wendy MacDonald  
Attachment: Original Letter of Invitation