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Chapter 6.1

Conceptual Frameworks for Partnerships in Service Learning: Implications for Research

Robert G. Bringle and Patti Clayton

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Conceptual Frameworks for Partnerships in Service Learning: Implications for Research

Surveys of research on service learning (e.g., Bringle & Steinberg, 2010; Eyler, 2011; Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001) establish that such research has focused predominantly on students and student outcomes, with less attention to faculty, institutions, and community. Although university researchers have an understandable interest in students because of the importance of students' educational outcomes to the mission of higher education institutions, one of the fundamental commitments of service learning is valuing the contributions and outcomes of all constituencies as activities and initiatives are designed, implemented, evaluated, and studied (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). Cruz and Giles (2000) recommended as a remedy for the paucity of solid community-focused research "that the university-community partnership itself be the unit of analysis" (p. 31); however, over a decade later, partnerships—their dynamics, qualities, and outcomes—are conspicuously infrequent as a focus for research on service learning.

Partnership is a pervasive term in the literature on service learning (e.g., Cruz & Giles, 2000; Dorado & Giles, 2004; Jacoby, 2003). The concept receives attention because of the functional role of partnerships in establishing service activities in and with the community, the implications of valuing reciprocity in relationships among all participants in the pedagogy, and the fundamental role of collaboration in service learning. Typically in the literature on service learning in particular and civic engagement more generally, partnership refers to the relationship between institutions and communities, as in the term campus-community partnerships. We have previously suggested that this framing of partnership is inadequate and misleading in at least two ways (Bringle, Clayton, & Price, 2009; Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, & Morrison, 2010), which are explored below as background for this chapter's examination of conceptual frameworks and research related to partnerships as the unit of analysis.

First (as discussed in Bringle, Clayton, et al., 2009; Clayton et al., 2010), there are multiple constituencies who are relevant to and involved in service learning, but the framing of partnership as being between campus and community can easily obscure the existence of the various constituents, the differences among them, and the dynamics of their distinct interactions. Figure 1 delineates five key groups of constituencies or stakeholders—potential partners—as expressed in the SOFAR structural model: ***S****tudents,* ***O****rganizations* in the community, ***F****aculty,* ***A****dministrators* on the campus, and ***R****esidents* in the community (or, in some instances, clients or special interest populations). Across these five categories of participants, there are ten dyadic relationships, and each of the ten has two possible vectors, representing the direction of communication and influence. Triadic relationships and other networks, beyond dyads, are also illuminated by this model.

Insert Figure 1 here

Relative to the campus-community framing of partnerships, SOFAR encompasses greater differentiation and provides more precision; it allows a more detailed analysis of the nature of a wider range of interactions and relationships that are involved in service learning and other civic engagement activities. Differentiating community into staff of community Organizations and Residents acknowledges potential differences between those two groups—for example, differences in cultures, interests, perspectives, experiences, resources, roles, and power. One of the reasons for differentiating the otherwise monolithic term community into Organization staff and Residents is that community organization staff—frequently the point of contact for students, faculty, and professional staff on campus—have their own perspectives and agendas that may or may not represent those of residents (or clients) in the development, implementation, and improvement of service learning courses and related community activities. Students, in particular, may well have different types of interactions and relationships with community organization staff and with residents, and they may find their responsibilities to one of these populations in tension with their responsibilities to the other; the quality of their learning and of their service may depend on their attending to the similarities and differences between these two distinct stakeholder groups. Residents and organization staff also have relationships with one another. Although there could be additional differentiation among residents (e.g., by geographic location; by demographic attributes; by extent of involvement in a particular service learning project; by identity or role, such as parents, children, and neighbors), among organizational staff (e.g., Executive Director; staff members who organize or coordinate service learning students; staff who serve as mentors or co-educators in service learning projects), and among community organizations (e.g., by sector, such as government, business, education), these two categories are prominent in service learning and warrant initial delineation.

The differentiation of campus into Students, Faculty, and Administrators is similarly based on the importance of acknowledging that these participants have different cultures, interests, perspectives, experiences, resources, roles, and power. Administrators as a category includes professional staff who support service learning; deans and chairs who play key roles in allocating resources and reviewing faculty performance; and executive leaders who develop policies (e.g., for promotion and tenure), interpret mission, distribute resources, develop strategic plans, and acknowledge students and faculty involved in service learning (Langseth & Plater, 2004). The category of Faculty includes not only the instructors of a particular service learning enhanced course, course sequence, or learning community but also faculty champions, faculty who facilitate professional development opportunities related to service learning, members of faculty governance bodies, and faculty who serve as student advisors. Students as a category includes those enrolled in a particular course; others participating in service learning activities or projects; and student leaders who design, support, and conduct research related to service learning (in the classroom, at community organizations, in service learning offices; see Zlotkowski, Longo, & Williams, 2006). Stakeholders in each of these three categories interact with or otherwise influence one another in the context of service learning. In addition, they all have their own relationships with residents and community organization staff that warrant unique attention.

A second limitation associated with the framing of campus-community partnership involves precision in describing and analyzing partnership processes and outcomes (Bringle, Clayton et al., 2009; Clayton et al., 2010). The term partnership has been used in two distinct ways in the literature, which can be a source of confusion. Partnership is used in a broad sense to refer to any type of relationship, and it is used more specifically to refer to relationships with particular qualities (e.g., trust, good communication, common interests, respect). We have suggested using the term relationship as a general and broad term to refer to all types of interactions between persons and partnership to refer to relationships in which the interactions possess three particular qualities: closeness, equity, and integrity. Closeness is a function of (a) frequency of interaction, (b) diversity of activities that are the basis of the interactions, and (c) strength of influence on the other person's behavior, decisions, plans, and goals (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989; Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Bringle, Officer, Grim, & Hatcher, 2009). The quality of equity exists, even when the inputs and outcomes are unequal, to the degree that outcomes are perceived as proportionate to inputs and that those ratios are similar (Hatfield, Utne, & Traupmann, 1979). Relationships have high integrity when they include persons who have a strong, internal commitment over time to making a difference in the lives of others due to empathetic concern (Bringle, Hatcher, & MacIntosh, 2006).

Thus, not all relationships in service learning are partnerships. Community placements involve relationships but not necessarily partnerships; communication and coordination of activities, while necessary, are not sufficient conditions for partnerships. All of the ten dyadic relationships conceptualized in SOFAR (and their combinations, e.g., triadic), however, have the potential to be partnerships. Any instance of each of these ten dyadic relationships can be located on a relationship continuum from unaware to transformational (Bringle, Clayton et al., 2009); at and beyond the point on the continuum at which the relationship is characterized by closeness, equity, and integrity—often a point of shared resources and integration of goals—it can be considered a partnership.

Underlying the SOFAR structural framework and the distinction between relationships and partnerships is the conceptualization and analysis of service learning and civic engagement activities as interactions between individuals. Each individual involved in service learning is a candidate for the term partner, and the many relationships between and among the full set of individuals involved can all be examined, evaluated, and studied through the lens of their partnership status and potential. Relationships and partnerships also exist between organizations (chapter 6.2); also, analyses can occur at other levels (e.g., media, policy, legislative, public health, community outcomes) that are implicated in service learning (Domegan & Bringle, 2010). The focus of this chapter, however, is the interpersonal level. Furthermore, the focus here is primarily on the subset of SOFAR-based relationships and partnerships that include community members; chapter 6.3 examines those relationships that students have with other stakeholders. We believe that the examination of theory, measurement, design, practice, and future research included here is applicable to all dyadic relationships in SOFAR; however, this presumption warrants empirical evaluation.

Theoretical Frameworks

Why do individuals come together in the first place and what is the nature and fate of their interactions? Bringle and Hatcher (2002) suggest that interactions may occur serendipitously or intentionally. Unplanned interactions may result from adventitious circumstances, such as a disaster around which there is a collective response, or because a third party or common interest brings individuals together. Wright (1999) suggests that individuals in any interaction, planned or unplanned, face two tasks: "(1) deciding what type of relationship we would like to pursue (if any) and, (2) conveying our interest (or lack of interest) to the other person" (p. 39). Cox (2000) has delineated a parallel set of questions for individuals involved specifically in civic engagement activities: (a) What types of activities or programs are implemented? (b) Who are the parties involved in or affected by those activities? (c) What are the individual interests of those parties? (p. 10). Theoretical perspectives that deal with who the parties are, what they might want or expect to accomplish through an interaction (whether brief or enduring), and who they want to become through the interaction are useful in conceptualizing, undertaking, and investigating the relationships and partnerships at the heart of service learning.

Exchange Theory

One theoretical framework for analyzing interpersonal relationships is provided by exchange theory (e.g., Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991), which analyzes the rewards and costs that occur in interactions. According to exchange theory, the status and nature of relationships are assumed to be functions of the net outcomes (rewards less costs) that are realized and anticipated (e.g., Liederman, Furco, Zapf, & Goss, 2003). If the net outcomes are appraised as at least minimally acceptable and better than alternative relationship options, then the relationship is initiated and maintained. There are many determinants in the appraisal of rewards and costs, but Singh et al. (2009) present evidence that all of the antecedents of attraction are mediated through trust and respect. High trust and high respect result in greater attractiveness of the relationship, one indicator of which is expressed with the term "closeness."

Bringle and Hatcher (2002) describe how exchange theory can be used as a basis for understanding the initiation (e.g., who chooses to interact with whom, why, with what degree of motivation and commitment), maintenance (e.g., power, dependency, relative dependency, equity), and dissolution (e.g., transformation of outcomes, reasons for termination, importance of monitoring outcomes) of relationships and partnerships in service learning. Although reducing analysis of service learning relationships and partnerships to exchanges may seem to trivialize the process and the outcomes, this perspective provides a set of conceptual tools that highlights the dynamics of exchanges that can take place, the motivational and power dynamics that might occur, the importance of values and communication, and the role that self-interest can play in service learning settings (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Domegan & Bringle, 2010).

Examining relationships and partnerships in terms of exchanges does not necessarily reduce the analysis to the individual's self-interests and personal perspective. Exchange theory also posits that outcomes in exchanges can transcend the individual level and can be analyzed in terms of joint outcomes (Kelley, 1979), a communal attitude (Clark & Mills, 1979), and accommodation that supports mutual trust and a long-term perspective (Rusbult et al., 1991).

Closeness, Equity, and Integrity

Research on interpersonal relationships (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989), based on Kelley et al.'s (1983) analysis of interdependency, identifies three components necessary in defining close relationships: (a) frequency of interaction, (b) diversity of interaction, and (c) strength of influence on the other party's behavior, decisions, plans, and goals. Relationships involving frequent interactions have the potential to be closer than those involving less frequent interactions; thus, frequent interaction is an important but incomplete index of closeness. When persons engage in many different types of activities together, the relationship is closer than when persons interact just as frequently but always engage in the same activity during their time together. In addition to frequent and diverse interactions, relationships that demonstrate interdependency, bi-lateral influence, and consensual decision making are even closer. According to this perspective, closeness is a composite of all three of these attributes. Closeness is a good summary concept for the nature of relationships that may be sufficient for some analyses but that produces a more complete summary when combined with equity and integrity.

The types of outcomes and costs that are realized in any relationship are qualitatively different for each person involved; therefore, it is difficult to have a standard for the equality of the exchanges that take place. An alternative basis for analyzing exchanges is that they be equitable rather than equal. Equity theory posits that equitable relationships exist when outcomes are perceived to be proportionate to inputs for each person; equitable relationships are also more satisfying than inequitable relationships in which someone is perceived to be over-benefited or under-benefited (Walster & Walster, 1978). When relationships are considered to be inequitable, there will be either (a) attempts to restore equity by adjusting investments or (b) pressure to dissolve the relationship when adjustments are not possible (Hatfield et al., 1979). McLean and Behringer (2008) illustrate how equity theory can frame the development, evaluation, and improvement of campus-community relationships to promote greater equity.

Not derived from exchange theory, an additional basis for conceptualizing relationship processes and outcomes is the degree to which integrity is present. Morton (1995) characterizes integrity as being embedded in each individual's approach to service activities by using the language of anthropologist Geertz (1973) to describe the conditions under which integrity ranges from "thin" to "thick" (p. 21). Community service lacks integrity, or is thin, when it is paternalistic or self-centered, produces negative consequences, creates dependencies and false expectations, and leaves others tired and cynical (p. 28). In contrast, high levels of integrity possess,

> deeply held, internally coherent values; match means and ends; describe a primary way of interpreting and relating to the world; offer a way of defining problems and solutions; and suggest a vision of what a transformed world might look like. (Morton, 1995, p. 28)

Bringle et al. (2006) developed a measure of integrity that contained two factors: Identity and Long-term Commitment. Both aspects of integrity were found to be higher among those students who were involved in more types of service activities than those involved in fewer types.

Exploitation, Transaction, and Transformation

Enos and Morton (2003) discuss the differences between transactional and transformative orientations to campus-community partnerships. They define transactional partnerships as instrumental (designed to complete a particular task) and exchange-based (each gaining something from the other). In transformational partnerships, on the other hand, individuals grow through what are often more open-ended, long-term relationships that foster exploring emergent possibilities, revising goals and identities, and changing systems beyond the status quo.

Clayton et al. (2010) operationalized this distinction along a continuum for the purpose of assessing and improving relationships and partnerships in service learning and civic engagement. In so doing, they include relationships that are so unilateral that, intentionally or unintentionally, they take advantage of or harm one or both parties; they label this end of the continuum "exploitative." Based on an examination of the literature on partnerships, nine key attributes were identified on which relationships were viewed as being exploitative (e.g., costs exceeding benefits for one or both persons), transactional (net benefits to one or both persons but no significant growth), or transformational (growth and enhanced capacity in and through the relationship for one or both persons).

One of the assumptions of transformational relationships is that they change the individual and can become defining and influential features of one's self (Tajfel, 1981; Turner & Oakes, 1989). Thus, they are assumed to define not only the person in the relationship but also "the things we do, the attitudes and values we hold, and the way we perceive and react to people around us" (Hogg, 2003, p. 462). Accordingly, self-expansion theories posit that transformational relationships will result in the relationship becoming part of individuals' cognitive identity and sense of self-efficacy (Aron, Mashek, & Aron, 2004).

Identity and Relationships

Bringle and Hatcher (2002) note that a clear sense of identity and self-awareness, coupled with communication skills that permit self-disclosure, are assets that can facilitate decisions about whether to initiate and continue a relationship or partnership:

> self-disclos[ing] effectively during the early phases of a campus-community relationship, a clear sense of identity and purpose (e.g., a mission statement, program priorities, strategic plan, learning objectives), procedures (e.g., policies, service learning contracts, liability issues, evaluation of student performance), and resources (e.g., personnel, facilities, time) need to exist and be effectively communicated to the other party. (p. 507)

The SOFAR model identifies many persons who need to negotiate their identities as they are represented in interactions associated with service learning. These persons need to have a sense of who they are, why they are engaging in the interaction, what they want to become, and an awareness of how they want to be treated by the other persons involved.

Although an individual's personality and self-concept may seem stable, enduring, and fixed, the nature of social environments and interactions play a regular role in shaping and defining identity. Social psychologists distinguish, then, between personal self-views, defined by individual characteristics (e.g., tall, educated) and traits (e.g., empathetic, conscientious), and social self-views that are generated by the social groups to which one belongs (e.g., Democrat, Republican) and by the values that are associated with membership in those groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Yet, these two self-views are interrelated because, for example, traits (e.g., being extroverted) influence the types of situations entered (e.g., social vs. private), and the types of social settings entered influence the expression of personal characteristics. Thus, social influences are assumed to be shaped by (a) the person's view of self (I am a helpful person), (b) the person's aspirations (I wish I were more assertive), and (c) the expectations that others might have of the person (We expect you to be more empathetic). These factors create intrapersonal and interpersonal tensions. Identity negotiation involves (a) the desire by persons to have others see them as they see themselves (self-verification) and (b) others wanting a person to behave in ways that fulfill their—the others'—expectations (behavioral confirmation). Persons have many strategies for engaging in identity negotiation, including preferential interactions with particular types of individuals or in certain types of situations; they also have selective memory for self-verifying cues and stronger motivation for interactions that provide self-verification (Swann, 1983; 2005). Furthermore, individuals should have a strong motivation for types of interactions in which expectations for self and expectations from others are aligned with and affirm self-views because they provide a supportive environment for growth (e.g., mentor/mentee learning relationship). Research on identity negotiation demonstrates that the influence is two-way (Swann, 1983, 2005).

Although the inclination is to seek self-verifying interactions, service learning involves relationships and partnerships that might include novel or uncomfortable (i.e., not self-verifying) interactions. Expectations of one another in these interactions may produce growth through relationships or undermine commitment to them. When individuals enter novel or new environments that embody unfamiliar norms, accommodation to those new environments can alter self-views (Hormuth, 1990). Identifying with unfamiliar others, especially when doing so provides a basis for self-enhancement (and also self-verification) can result in a strong in-group bias (favoritism, advocacy, prejudice; Brewer & Kremer, 1985). The identification with groups, issues, and causes can lead to more extreme expressions of collective action with the group members. Social identity theory predicts that collective action (e.g., protests, demonstrations) will occur when there is perceived injustice, efficacy, and strong identity (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). A fusion of personal and social self and a strong, central identification with a group can result in extreme behavior that is dedicated to the group (e.g., dying for one's country; Swann, Gomez, Seyle, Morales, & Huici, 2009).

Review of Past Research on Relationships and Partnerships in Service Learning

Rubin (2000) identifies six types of analytical work on university-community partnerships: (a) case study descriptions, usually written by a participant and often with a longitudinal approach to understanding change over time (Daynes, Howell, & Lindsay, 2003 provide an examination of a 48-year relationship); (b) descriptions of strategies for studying partnerships; (c) comparisons within a collection of case studies; (d) data systems that contain multiple programs (e.g., final reports of grant programs); and (e) evaluations of national programs that have supported local projects and programs. Most of this work involves evaluation of the implementation of a project or program or of university or community outcomes and therefore constitutes program evaluation (asking: What were the outcomes of a program? Did a particular program produce its intended outcomes?). To a large degree, the analyses summarized by Rubin are descriptive, focused on particular programs, qualitative, and not guided by theory (although any particular study might have an implicit or explicit logic model to the program design); some provide analysis of longitudinal issues in developing partnerships (e.g., planning, initiation, obstacles) or a basis for recommendations for improving practice, and some provide raw material for subsequent analyses. Hanssmann and Grignon

(2007) provide a more recent compilation of references related to civic engagement relationships and partnerships, intentionally selected with community partners in mind. The list of references includes a range of case studies, most often focused on participatory action research and community-based research. In all cases, research has been limited to relationships that have persisted, with no attention has been directed at relationships that have failed and that have been terminated.

When studies focus on community outcomes (e.g., Bell-Elkins, 2002; Clarke, 2003; Jorge, 2003; Schmidt & Robby, 2002), the connection between the analysis of those outcomes and analyses of the relationship or partnership is often ambiguous. Furthermore, that a community member serves as a source of information in a study does not mean that the inquiry advances understanding of nor has implications for relationships or partnerships. The same can be said of studies focused on student, faculty, or administrator outcomes or data sources: the evidence may have little to do with the relationships between these persons. This section reviews research that intentionally targets relationships or partnerships that involve community organization staff or residents—O and R in the SOFAR model—as a unit of analysis in the research, as suggested by Cruz and Giles (2000).

Liederman et al. (2003) conducted a focus group with 19 experienced community partners from community-based organizations (i.e., organization staff, not residents) using questions such as: What is a good and bad partnership? What are the exciting aspects of the partnership? What are the benefits and costs? What advice do you have for campuses? What recommendations do you have for the broad field? Content analysis of the discussion surfaced both consensus (e.g., the importance of "careful preparation, excellent implementation, and meticulous follow-through," p. 6) and disagreement (e.g., required vs. voluntary service; the role of community partners as co-educators). The approach to this research did include asking respondents to make benefits and costs salient at stages of the relationship (e.g., initiation, continuation) and, presumably, the respondents made longitudinal assessments about the equity (i.e., parity, fairness) and integrity across the relationship's history. Using the criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Guba, 1981), there is no report that the interpretation of the interviews was checked with the participants (i.e., member checking to establish credibility).

Dorado and Giles (2004) provide an analysis of service learning relationships that had been in existence at least three years. They conducted interviews with instructors, service learning coordinators, and community representations (presumably all from community-based organizations, but not residents or clients, p. 27). Three different pathways of engagement between campus and community organizations were identified: tentative engagement, aligned engagement, and committed engagement. They found that, as a general pattern, newer relationships were more likely to be tentative and longer-term relationships were more likely to be committed. The researchers state that the study was based on negotiated order theory; however, it is not clear how the theory guided the nature of the research questions or the methods, except at the most general level (e.g., there were no stated hypotheses based on the theory). The research appears to have begun with a pre-determined conceptual framework for pathways of engagement (identified in the introduction to the article) rather than having inductively arrived at the framework. Although the researchers indicate that the study was designed to obtain “evidence on the progressions of partnerships,” (p. 33) the cross-sectional design used provides only a snapshot in time of the relationships, with retrospective accounts by participants included. Using Guba’s (1981) criteria, there is no report that the interpretation of the interviews was checked with the participants (i.e., member checking to establish credibility). The study does report discrepant findings but fails to triangulate the interview results with a survey that those interviewed (and others) had completed (i.e., confirmability). The relevance of the findings to others (i.e., dependability) will await replication and the use of the framework by others.

Sandy and Holland (2006) analyze community partners’ perspectives on service learning relationships. The 99 participants in a series of focus groups conducted by non-university facilitators were all staff at partnering organizations who were experienced with service learning (across a range of relationships with various institution types). The participants’ comments reinforced the presumption that relationships are a fundamental building block for the success of service learning. The most frequently identified determinant of effective relationships was communication, followed by the capacity of individuals to understand the community partner’s perspective (e.g., work culture, needs, goals), personal connections, and collaborative planning and accountability. Implicit research questions and, presumably the questions that guided the focus group discussions, were shaped by principles of good practice regarding service learning partnerships drawn from the literature. The results highlight tangible benefits to organizations, clients, and organizational staff as well as transformational learning. Although the authors did not use these terms, there was evidence that the community partners described successful and enduring relationships as being high valued, equitable, and reflecting a common mission (i.e., integrity). The results also point out that organizations in urban settings had more options for the benefits offered by service learning students and expressed less dependency on any particular course or campus than did organizations in rural settings. Because this was a qualitative study, the research was not intended to evaluate explicit hypotheses. Using Guba’s (1981) criteria for qualitative research, the notes from the focus groups were shared with participants (i.e., credibility). The researchers conducted the focus groups in community settings with experienced facilitators who were not affiliated with any university (context as an element of transferability). Dominant themes were identified through an iterative process of initial listings, content analysis, and interpretation by team members and community partners (dependability and confirmability), although no triangulation with other data sources or techniques was conducted.

Clayton et al. (2010) conducted an empirical study of relationships between faculty and community members from the point of view of the faculty member. The Transformational Relationship Evaluation Scale (TRES)—a self-report quantitative instrument that includes items related to the nine dimensions of outcomes, common goals, decision-making, resources, conflict management, identity formation, power, significance, and satisfaction and change for the better—was used along with qualitative data (interviews) to establish the extent to which TRES could differentiate among exploitive, transactional, and transformational relationships in a way that aligned with other measures of closeness. Faculty respondents described (qualitatively) and reported (quantitatively) that their relationships were largely transactional and that they desired them to be more transformational. In addition to enabling formative interventions that can help to deepen relationships, informed by analysis of each of the nine dimensions, TRES can benchmark progressive and regressive longitudinal changes in relationships. This research was guided by all four bodies of theory discussed above (exchange, closeness, exploitation / transaction / transformation, and identity) but only examined a small number of faculty perspectives on their relationships with community members. This approach can be used to study other person's perspectives on other relationships in SOFAR, including over time, and can be used as a tool for improving relationships.

Measurement Approaches

Assessing the nature of the relationship and understanding how relationships change over time is critical to developing the capacity to study the role of relationships in service learning courses. The assessment approaches described below are generally focused on the community respondent's relationship to faculty and/or students. In some cases, these respondents speak for residents or clients, but these stakeholders have seldom been given a direct voice. The study of relationships between those on campus (students, faculty, and administrators) is conspicuously absent, although many of the measurement procedures could be used for relationships between any constituencies in SOFAR.

Qualitative Measurement

The dominant strategies for assessing relationships and partnerships in service learning have been conducting case studies, focus groups, and interviews with community partners or community leaders who have varying experience with service learning courses in terms of breadth (one course vs. multiple courses) and depth (short-term experience vs. long-term experience) (e.g., Buys & Bursnall, 2007; Clarke, 2003; Daynes, Howell, & Lindsay, 2003; Dorado & Giles, 2004; Liederman et al., 2003; Miron & Moely, 2005; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Vernon, & Ward, 1999; Stoecker, Tryon, & Hilgendorf , 2009; Worrall, 2007). By inference from reported method or results, these approaches have posed questions about a mix of issues associated with service learning and have focused to some degree on the dynamics and qualities of relationships and partnerships; questions have concerned preparation for and design of the course, student contributions to community work, logistics of collaboration, outcomes, and the nature of the relationship (e.g., communication, obstacles, positive qualities, ebb and flow). These qualitative approaches may use purposive or convenience samples, the questions may be structured or semi-structured, and the origin of the questions as well as the procedures for interpreting the responses are varied. The qualitative approaches to measurement do, in many cases, align with a focus on benefits (outcomes for multiple constituencies) and costs (obstacles, shortcomings), and they also deal with issues of equity (i.e., fairness) and, sometimes, the integrity of the relationship. Focus groups, interviews, and case studies can be adapted to gathering information from other constituencies and also studying the full range of relationships identified in SOFAR as well as others that might be implicated in service learning activities. The process of conducting these qualitative assessments may be important in surfacing the voice of each constituency and contributing to future commitment to civic engagement activities among respondents and investigators alike (Stoecker et al., 2009). This approach may also inform suggestions for future research using related or different methods.

Self-Report Quantitative Measurement of Relationships in General

Relationships and partnerships exist in domains of collaborative work and research other than service learning. There are several measures from this other work that researchers may want to consider for use in studies related to service learning. Although most of these do not have supporting evidence on their psychometric characteristics (reliability, validity; see Bringle, Phillips, & Hudson, 2004), they still may be useful when their content aligns with particular areas of interest in a service learning research project.

Hardy, Hudson, and Waddington (2003) developed a self-report inventory to assess relationships in the public sector focused on health and social care, but it is applicable to a broader range of relationships. The tool provides a method to explore the views and aspirations of the constituents in both new and existing relationships as well as a developmental framework for improving relationships. It was designed to be suitable for executive leaders, senior managers, and front-line staff to complete and is focused on six areas that were identified through research and fieldwork (Hardy et al., 2003, p. 14): (a) recognize and accept the need for the relationship; (b) develop clarity and realism of purpose; (c) ensure commitment and ownership; (d) develop and maintain trust; (e) create clear and robust arrangements; and (f) monitor, measure, and learn. There is a six-item version for rapid assessment and 36-item version with six-item scales that measure each of the six components. No psychometric information (i.e., reliability, validity) is reported beyond content validity.

The United Nations developed the Partnership Assessment Tool (PAT), which is a self-report inventory that can be used for investigating cross-sector relationships between government, business, and nonprofit organizations. Available free of charge on a CD-ROM (http://www.unglobalcompact.org/issues/partnerships/pat.html), it is designed to foster and improve the effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of relationships. The PAT includes six key dimensions of relationships: (a) alignment of shared objectives; (b) internal relationship management, including resources needed; (c) management with external stakeholders for long-term sustainability; (d) multiplier effect, (e) environment, and (f) socio-economic impact. The PAT provides a way of assessing the expectations held for the relationship and elements of it that might need additional attention or adjustment. Although not developed for higher education or service learning, the PAT might be particularly useful for assessing cross-sector relationships in the community that are associated with a service learning course. There is no psychometric evaluation of the instrument beyond content validity.

The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory (Mattessich, Murray-Close, & Monsey, 2001) is a self-report inventory that is based on six categories of factors that influence the success of collaborations or coalitions: factors related to (a) the environment, (b) membership characteristics, (c) process and structure, (d) communication, (e) purpose, and (f) resources. The inventory provides a score for each of these factors. Although this inventory is focused on collaboration in general, it is appropriate for assessing and investigating relationships and partnerships in service learning and civic engagement. There is no psychometric information on the inventory beyond content validity.

Assessing Service Learning Relationships and Partnerships

Shinnanon, Gelmon, and Holland (1999) developed a survey that can be used with community partners at the end of a service learning course or program. The survey includes questions about partners' perceptions of the impact of the experience on students; about their own motivation to participate and their concerns regarding logistics, roles, and responsibilities; and about the nature of the university-community relationship. There is no psychometric information for this scale beyond content validity.

Bell-Elkins (2002) developed a scale that focuses on the key principles of a relationship that are identified by Community-Campus Partnerships for Health. The scale has multiple items that measure aspects of the following areas of a relationship: (a) agreement on mission and goals; (b) mutual trust, respect, and commitment; (c) builds on strengths, but acknowledges areas of improvement; (d) power and resources; (e) communication, including listening and common language; (f) shared input into roles, norms, and procedures; (g) feedback from all informs improvement; (h) credit and recognition acknowledges the relationship's accomplishments; (i) commitment over time; and (j) the community is salient in the relationships. No psychometric information other than content validity was found.

Clayton et al. (2010) developed TRES as a self-report scale to measure dimensions of relationships in terms of the degree to which the relationship displays properties associated with being exploitive, transactional, or transformational on nine issues (i.e., outcomes, common goals, decision-making, resources, conflict management, identity formation, power, significance, and satisfaction and change for the better). TRES can be used to evaluate the status of existing relationships on the exploitive-transactional-transformative continuum. The scale has good internal consistency (i.e., reliability) and demonstrated convergent validity with two other measures of relationships: a graphic representation of closeness and items that measured closeness. Any individual's perspective that is captured by TRES could also be related to other types of information and other sources of quantitative and qualitative evidence, such as antecedents of the relationships (characteristics of the individuals, the reasons for initiating the relationship, resources invested), to other indicators of the process (e.g., archival records of communications), and to other outcomes (e.g., changes on performance indicators) associated with the relationship. TRES can provide additional diagnostic information about how the components are rated on the exploitive-transactional-transformational continuum.

A graphic measure of the closeness in a relationship consists of progressively overlapping circles in two-circle Venn diagrams (Mashek, Cannaday, & Tangney, 2007) (Figure 2).

Insert Figure 2 here

Respondents are asked to indicate which Venn diagram represents the current degree of closeness. They can also be asked to indicate which pair of circles represents the desired closeness or closeness at some earlier stage of the relationship. Clayton et al. (2010) found that the Venn diagram measure of closeness correlated above .60 with TRES and can be considered a measure of closeness that is quick, nonverbal, and user-friendly.

Implications for Practice

Conceptualizing relationships and partnerships in service learning at the interpersonal level and viewing them through the lens of exchange theory is an important perspective that has implications for service learning. Bringle and Hatcher (2002) note that exchange theory implies that relationship initiation will be enhanced when individuals have purposes and goals that are clearly articulated to one another so that the potential of a relationship can be evaluated by everyone involved. Such clarity may be advanced by a mission statement that is associated with each person's organization (e.g., department, nonprofit) or initiative (e.g., course), a campus or community clearinghouse that can represent interests of stakeholders and serves a match-making role, or planning (e.g., goals, strategic plan) that precedes initiation of a relationship. Communication skills and relationship competencies (e.g., appropriately asserting displeasure, providing emotional support, managing interpersonal conflict) promote relationship development and maintenance (Buhrmester, Furman, Wittenberg, & Reis, 1988). According to exchange theory, only when outcomes exceed or are expected to exceed what is minimally desired will a relationship be initiated (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1991). Therefore, processes and procedures that can help potential partners accurately appraise what might be gained from a relationship may facilitate its initiation.

Satisfaction is a function of how much outcomes exceed what is minimally desired, and program components can be developed that give attention to the outcomes that each constituent desires or expects. Dependency on a relationship is a function of the degree to which relationship outcomes exceed what is available from an alternative relationship (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). In some cases, there may be no alternative relationship (e.g., there is only one school system in the community for a faculty member to partner with; there is only one School of Education on campus for a principal of an elementary school to partner with). High dependency leads to high levels of commitment and less likelihood of the relationship ending (Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1991). Relative dependency describes the comparative levels of each party's dependency: who invests more, who commits more, who puts more effort into the relationship, and who gains more unique outcomes from the relationship? Waller's (1938) principle of least interest states that the party with the least interest in the relationship has the most power.

Satisfaction, dependency, and relative dependency have implications for the practice of relationships and partnerships in service learning. Bringle and Hatcher (2002) note that, although longevity of a relationship may be viewed as a desirable characteristic, enduring relationships may persist because of chronic dependency that inhibits self-sufficiency or because of power differences due to unequal relative dependency. Thus, regular monitoring and having mechanisms for feedback (e.g., advisory groups, mid-semester monitoring, focus groups, surveys, external consultants) can provide the opportunity for all constituencies to express perceptions of power differentials and inappropriate dependency. For example, Bringle and Hatcher (in Bringle, Hatcher, Sandy, Holland & Mitchell, 2006) reported that, in a community survey, community respondents indicated that the university was more involved in their affairs than they were in university affairs. How can reflection exercises be developed and enhanced that focus students and others on examining and analyzing relationships in SOFAR from their perspective or the perspectives of others? SOFAR can provide a starting point for different consitutencies to produce sociograms that map the nature of relationships among key stakeholders, with individual or joint reflection on how to improve relationships and enhance connections to others (Price & Officer, 2011). Can faculty learning about the principles of civic engagement be enhanced through a critical examination of SOFAR relationships with TRES? Furthermore, there needs to be vigilance regarding the types of issues that terminate relationships (e.g., ineptitude, rule breaking, deception, lack of interest, conflict; Duck, 1988).

Practice will be improved when there are mechanisms for regularly affirming and recognizing the value of the relationship or partnership to those involved and to broader audiences. Because social identity is tied to association with groups, enhancing identification with the work, the organizations and institutions involved, and the community issue may promote behaviors and attitudes that sustain relationships (e.g., t-shirts with names of programs or organizations). Mobilization and collective action is particularly likely when there is strong social identity, the perception of injustice, and a strong sense of efficacy (van Zomeren et al., 2008), all of which might be strategically promoted through course-based and community-based activities (e.g., speakers, key readings, reflection activities that make these issues salient).

Another way in which a focus on the relationships and partnerships can have practical implications is through the use of assessment methods that are based on the key components of interpersonal interactions. All of the assessment procedures reviewed above (with the exception of the Venn diagram method developed by Mashek et al., 2007) focus on multiple qualities of relationships that provide a basis for critical examination of these components (e.g., communication, power, distribution of resources, conflict management). When completed by multiple partners, the results of the assessment activities can be shared and thus serve as a basis for discussion about similarities and differences across different persons' perspectives and across various relationship qualities or dimensions. According to the materials associated with the PAT developed by the United Nations:

> PAT users report that simply working together with potential partners to complete the tool's questions helps to solidify the foundation for a successful partnership. The process aims to ensure openness and improve understanding among partners on the specific challenges related to their collaboration. In the words of one company, "By using the tool during the partnership development, both parties get a better understanding for each other's priorities and values." (Korpela, 2007, para. 11)

Any of these scales can provide a basis of identifying which relationship attributes receive high ratings, which ones receive low ratings, and when there are marked differences among partners in ratings for an attribute. Such information can be discussed and acted on through participatory processes.

Agenda for Future Research

Based on the theoretical perspectives and measurement procedures that have been summarized, several suggestions emerge for potential research projects that can be undertaken to inform practice and increase understanding of how interpersonal interactions contribute (or inhibit) attaining outcomes for various constituencies.

Multiple Perspectives

Bringle and Hatcher (2002) state that,

> Because the outcomes of the relationship will be quantitatively and qualitatively different for each party and the standards against which they are appraised will be unique, the attractiveness of developing and maintaining a relationship will differ for each party. Thus, not only is a relationship evaluated from one's own perspective, but parties also examine what is invested and obtained from the relationship relative to the partner. However, many relationships suffer from the ambiguity generated by not knowing how much the other party contributes to and values the relationship (Swann, Hixon, & De La Ronda, 1992). (p. 509)

This issue of the nature of outcomes as well as the nature of costs or risks of losses being different for the various persons interacting in service learning raises important questions that can be explored in research. Future research can explore the nature of similarities and differences in appraisals of attributes of relationships and partnerships by participants. This could be done retrospectively (i.e., appraisals of what relationships were like at a particular point in time) or longitudinally (i.e., appraisals at multiple points in time). Because the rewards and costs may be very different for students, organization staff, faculty, administrators, and community residents, research can focus on how issues of equity and inequity are viewed, negotiated, and resolved. McLean and Behringer (2008) present a framework and method for examining equity from different perspective as a means of establishing common interests. The efficacy of their approach should be empirically evaluated (e.g., does it enhance understanding within a relationship). Furthermore, appraisals (e.g., with scales, SOFAR sociograms, interviews) by different persons can be compared to investigate how consensus or lack of consensus about the nature of the relationship or partnership is related to outcomes (e.g., closeness in a relationship, achieving goals). Diverse perspectives can also be evaluated to determine if and under what conditions they are an asset or a liability, relative to homogeneity of perspectives within a relationship (Bacon, 2002). In addition, differences in expectations (e.g., one person desires a transformational partnership, while the other person wants a transactional relationship) should be examined in terms of consequences for initiation, maintenance, and termination of relationships and for various outcomes (e.g., fairness, relative dependency).

Each quantitative method for assessing relationships and partnerships summarized above only begins to uncover the basis for a particular rating (e.g., decision making); supplementing any one approach with qualitative assessment (e.g., focus group) or reflective activities (e.g., strategic planning) may enhance understanding of not only what a rating is by different persons but also why they arrived at a particular appraisal. Research can explore the ways in which different components are important (e.g., beta weights in regression analyses that predict closeness) and how they can be further differentiated by additional assessment that focuses on more detailed analysis of a particular component. Presumably, research could explore the degree to which empathy that each individual brings to the interaction is important in determining sensitivity to these differences. Students may be concerned primarily with graduating, faculty with having a complaint-free semester with no surprises, the organization staff with completing work consistent with the organization's mission, residents with the quality of their lives, and administrators with having stories about good work for speeches. For episodic or time-limited relationships that are transactional, these types of differences may be managed at a superficial level (e.g., tolerance), with limited evidence of understanding, trust, integrity, or deep regard. The presence of merely tolerating differences may lead to misunderstandings of the level of the other person's commitment, interest, or investment (e.g., dependency, relative dependency). Do relationships that develop a communal attitude ("we" rather than "me") also demonstrate greater closeness, a greater sense of equity, and greater appreciation for the contributions of each individual toward common rather than personal goals? If these correlations are found, are they accompanied by greater identification with the community issue, the social network involved, and the level of advocacy for the work that is undertaken? What types of interventions can enhance relationship development? Future research can also investigate if this results in a greater sense of place and interest in further community-based activities after the end of the service learning course by students, faculty, and other constituencies.

Nature and Qualities of Interpersonal Relationships and Partnerships

Work on relationships has identified different kinds of relationships. Dorado and Giles (2004) identified tentative engagement, aligned engagement, and committed engagement. Clayton et al. (2010) identified exploitive, transactional, and transformational types of relationships. These typologies warrant additional research to determine if they are well-aligned with the experiences of individuals in service learning and if they have explanatory value associated with their theoretical foundations. SOFAR provides a starting point for elaborating individuals (i.e., sources of data) who can provide critical evaluation of these typologies. When additional information about types or stages of relationships is collected, the nature of these relationship as viewed by the stakeholders can be related to retrospective accounts of antecedent conditions (e.g., clarity of purpose, resources invested, promises made, expectations held) and to other existing sources of information about the relationship (e.g., memoranda of understanding, archival records of communication). Empirical evaluations of the importance of the attributes of closeness, equity, and integrity (or other attributes like trust, respect, understanding) should be conducted to determine how well they capture the quality of relationships and align with different types of relationships. How are micro- and macro-level analyses of communications related to various attributes of relationships over time?

A participant in a relationship can also provide not only self-appraisals on the various dimensions used in the instruments discussed above but also estimates of the appraisals of others. Such data can provide a basis for examining actual similarity (difference between each person's actual ratings), perceived similarity (differences between one person's actual ratings and the same person's perceived ratings of the other person), and mutual understanding (differences between one person's perceived rating of the other person and actual rating of the other person). These constructs can then be examined to determine how they are related to stages of relationships and to outcomes associated with the relationship for different constituencies. In the field of interpersonal attraction, Montoya, Horton, and Kirchner (2008) found in a meta-analysis that perceived similarity was a significant correlate of attraction across a wide range of relationship types (e.g., limited interactions, short-term relationships, existing relationships) and a better predictor of attraction than actual similarity. Similar analyses could be undertaken in the area of service learning relationships to understand better the dynamics of both developing and established relationships.

SOFAR focuses the analysis of interactions at the dyadic level, for simplicity of presentation and analysis. However, interactions are not limited to dyads, and individuals are embedded in elaborate social networks and collective structures, such as classes, boards, organizations, and neighborhood associations that can significantly influence interactions (see Bringle, Clayton et al., 2009 for an elaboration of SOFAR in terms of networks). Exchange theory postulates that there can be a transition from appraisals that are individual ("What do I get out of the relationship") to communal appraisals ("What do we get out of the relationship?"). When does this type of transition occur? Is it a precursor to a transition from transactional relationships (focused on mutual benefit) to transformational partnerships (focused on growth and change of individuals and broader systems)? How do these changes manifest themselves in each person's identity? What happens when only a few persons in a network experience this transition (e.g., cliques, being ostracized, being more valued)? How does this transition (or its absence) affect commitment, investment, distribution of resources, and power distribution in the relationship? Is it accompanied by merger of the individual's identity with the issue, work, or organizations involved? Why do some faculty integrate community partners in their curriculum design while others minimally engage partners only on a logistical level of providing placements? Under what conditions do some community partners identify themselves as co-educators, while others retain more limited views of their roles (Sandy & Holland, 2006)?

Measurement

A comparison of TRES (Clayton et al., 2010) and the Venn diagram measure of closeness (Mashek et al., 2007) raises interesting possibilities about alternative strategies for measuring relationships (Clayton et al., 2010). TRES is a verbal paper-and-pencil scale, was completed initially by faculty, and has unknown transferability to other stakeholders. Clayton et al. (2010) express reservations about that version being readily transferable and suggest that revisions may be appropriate before use with other constituencies. The Venn diagram is graphic, simple, and quick method for measuring closeness that was highly correlated with TRES (Clayton et al., 2010). However, the Venn diagram is a summary measure that does not capture any information about different dimensions of relationships that are contained in the scales discussed above. Future research should develop and investigate different approaches to quantitative measurement of the overall quality of a relationship and the component qualities of a relationship. In addition, more work should be devoted to determining how the qualitative methods discussed above can be utilized so as to generate theory.

Development of Relationships and Partnerships

Dorado and Giles (2004) provide an analysis of three different pathways of engagement between campus and community organizations: tentative engagement, aligned engagement, and committed engagement. They reject the use of stages and levels to describe relationships in favor of pathways (p. 25-26), with little analysis of the strengths and limitations of these approaches nor explanation for favoring one over the others. The relationships literature, for the sake of analogy, has similarly provided descriptions of different pathways as social and romantic relationships develop (Surra, 1987). TRES and other paper-and-pencil scales provide additional tools for describing patterns of change over time within relationships in service learning and civic engagement. Longitudinal research can help practitioners anticipate and nurture different types (or levels or pathways) of relationships and partnerships in service learning and civic engagement activities.

Bringle and Hatcher (2002) suggest that clear communications about identity, purpose, and values is an asset in determining whether and under what conditions a relationship should proceed. The SOFAR model posits that these communications are bi-directional. For example, the syllabus is one means of communicating the instructor's rationale and goals for including service learning in a course. How is this done most effectively with students? Community partners? Departmental administrators? What supports and what hinders such communication? Complementing this communication is the opportunity for students to share with faculty their own rationale and goals and, more fundamentally, for students to play a role in structuring service learning in particular and the course more generally. How is this done most effectively? How are community partners involved? Administrators? What supports and what hinders such communication? This type of analysis of the clarity and effectiveness of communication could be applied to the full range of relationships in SOFAR and a wide variety of specific topics related to changes in identity, purpose, and values.

Conducting research that increases understanding of progression and regression of relationships over time and/or that compares and contrasts different dyadic relationships in the same or different activities can contribute to a knowledge base about civic engagement relationships and when and how they become transformational partnerships. For example, Liederman et al. (2003) found that "many of the participating community partners provided examples of how their organization had begun to limit or decline to renew particular engagement opportunities" (p. 13) because of changes such that the costs exceeded the benefits. Why do some relationships flourish while others falter? How do antecedent conditions (e.g., clear purpose, good communication, compatibility of expectations) contribute to longevity and desired growth? How is clarity of purpose related to appropriate termination of a relationship? How and under what conditions do relationships move back and forth along the E-T-T continuum? What interventions facilitate and/or hinder such movement? What characteristics of individuals, disciplines, and professional fields lend themselves to either transactional or transformational relationships?

Correlation of Relationships with Other Variables

Relationships in service learning involve both processes (e.g., How do they occur? Are they reciprocal?) and outcomes (e.g., Do partners want to continue working together? Has a relationship deepened into a partnership? Have each person's goals been reached). How are characteristics of relationships and partnerships related to other types of outcomes (e.g., changes on performance indicators, changes to course design, changes in community organization policy, changes in quality of life experienced by residents)? What is the relationship between type of partnership (e.g., exploitative; transactional; transformational) and type of outcomes, if any? Are the educational outcomes (Section II) for students—their cognitive development, academic learning, civic learning, personal development, intercultural competence—different when there are transformational partnerships between faculty and community organization staff? Between either of these stakeholders and the students themselves? What dimensions of relationships most influence the learning outcomes experienced by students, faculty, organization staff, residents, and administrators? When and under what conditions do participants in service learning incorporate their relationships and partnerships into their identities? Under what conditions does such identity integration exclude or alienate those who do not experience it or set an example of possibilities that can be emulated by others?

Conclusion

Harvey and Orbuch (1991) make the following observation about research on interpersonal relationships:

> . . . no one approach, whether it emphasizes cognitive, social-psychological, personality, developmental, or psychophysiological processes, is sufficient to make sense of relationship phenomena. . . . the most compelling approaches will be integrative in nature (with the tacit point that it is likely that several fields of scholarship will have to come together to study these phenomena fully). (p. 332)

To the degree that it is useful to view service learning relationships as interpersonal interactions, the various disciplinary views (e.g., psychology, sociology, communication studies) on interpersonal relationships and their concepts, methods, measures, and theories are relevant resources to be considered in developing research that can contribute to deeper understanding and better practice of these relationships. Analysis of the strategies and methods used to develop relationships between individuals that are democratic (i.e., inclusive, participatory, just; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011) will advance existing principles of good practice. When interpersonal analysis is expanded beyond dyads to coalitions and networks, researchers will contribute to a broader understanding of relationships and partnerships in service learning and will position students, organization staff, faculty, community residents, and administrators to develop and revise practices, policies, and infrastructure accordingly.

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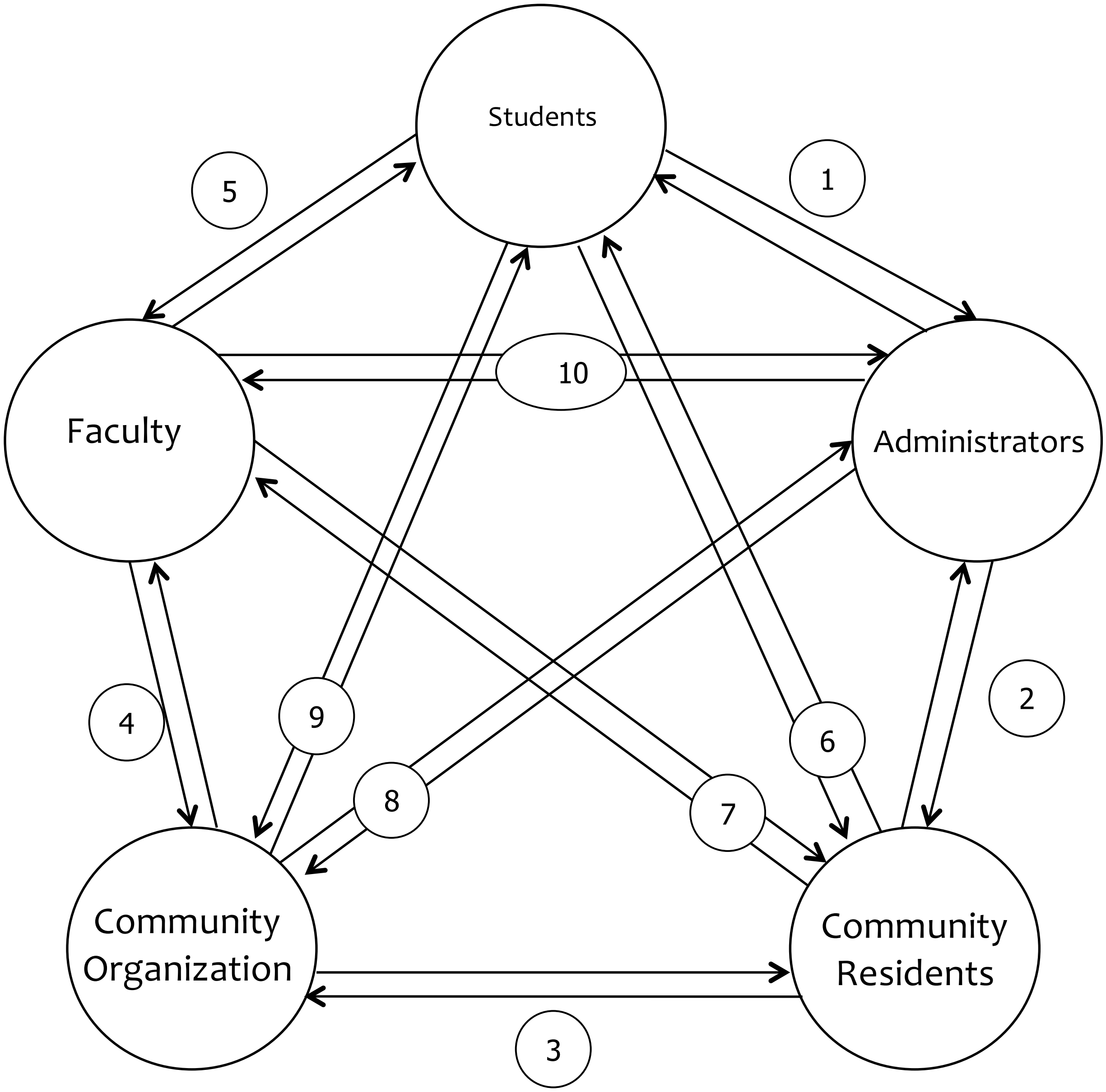

Figure 1. SOFAR Structural Framework.

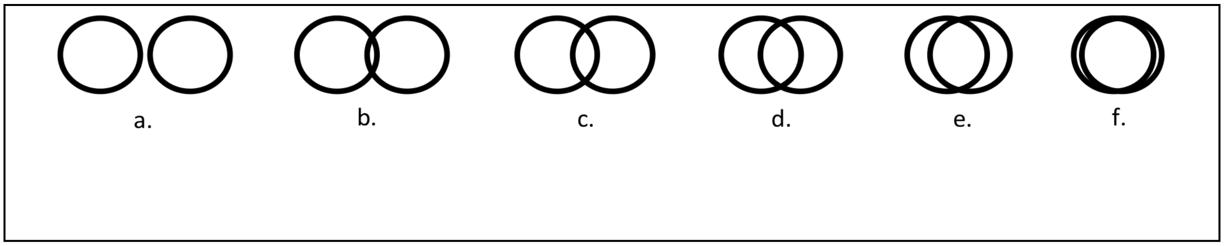

Figure 2. Venn Level of Closeness (from Mashek, Cannady, & Tangey, 2007).