



# Towards Productive Disagreement: Deliberative, Democratic Processes in Community Engagement and Service-Learning

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**This article argues that recognizing and addressing disagreements and differences among students, instructors, and community members is essential for building more collaborative, reciprocal partnerships in service-learning and community engagement (SL-CE) courses. While current SL-CE pedagogies recognize that disagreements and differences arise in SL-CE partnerships, little attention has been paid to how SL-CE participants can address such issues productively. This article draws from theories of democratic deliberation to suggest that engaging students in more direct and purposeful deliberation with SL-CE partners can help students develop key civic skills and ensure that projects reflect more collaborative efforts for all participants. The article concludes with practical pedagogical strategies that demonstrate how students, partners, and instructors can disagree productively and negotiate difference and expertise.**

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In recent years, scholarship on community-engaged pedagogies has increasingly emphasized the need for greater collaboration and reciprocity among students, faculty, and community members through shared research and projects. Growing in popularity across college campuses, pedagogies like service-learning and community engagement (SL-CE) strive to involve citizens, community organizations, academic researchers, and students in collaborative learning initiatives with goals of improved democratic education and actionable social change (Britt, 2014; Blythe, Grabill, & Riley, 2008; Windsor, 2013). These collaborative learning models are part of a larger civic engagement movement, which maintains that institutions of higher education should play an increased role in encouraging civic participation among students and faculty, in developing solutions to “real-world” problems, and in enacting social change

together with communities. Susan Ostrander (2004) notes: "A civic-engagement perspective [of higher education]...calls for faculty and students to engage with issues and questions that people in communities off campus name as important and to collaborate in true partnership, not simply consultation, with people outside the academy" (p. 77). This movement towards "true partnership" responds to criticisms of earlier service-learning pedagogies that positioned the university as "expert," helping the community as a passive "recipient" (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2000; Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Cushman, 1999; Morton, 1995).

Newer teaching paradigms, aiming for "true partnership," emphasize collaborating *with* community partners in order to identify shared problems and goals rather than acting *for* the community. Such partnerships are, ideally, more reciprocal and collaborative in that they address community needs rather than just university agendas, and they recognize the unique expertise of local citizens, not just of faculty and students (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). This push toward greater collaboration and reciprocity between universities and communities is a positive direction for SL-CE pedagogies, which generally uphold three main goals for effective partnerships: (a) to prepare students for professional life, (b) to cultivate increased civic engagement among students, and (c) to benefit the community. Collaboration is a key component of these three missions. In terms of professional preparation, Lori Britt (2014) notes, "most employers will not expect people to sit in rows and compete with colleagues. Collaborative work in groups, teams, departments and divisions is the norm in the world of work" (p. 51). Britt argues that SL-CE courses challenge the traditional university classroom model and improve students' ability to collaborate by encouraging them to work together to assess community partners' needs, to develop workable strategies, and to address unpredictability. Theories of democratic participation have long held that the ability to collaborate is an important skill for active, democratic citizens (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich & Corngold, 2007). Also, research has shown that collaboration with universities through SL-CE partnerships can benefit community organizations by offering opportunities for capacity building; access to universities' intellectual, financial, and infrastructural resources; increased public awareness of organizations' missions; and uncompensated labor (Driscoll, Holland, Gelman, & Kerrigan, 1996; Edwards, Mooney & Heald, 2001).

In light of this research, it would be difficult to disagree that collaboration and reciprocity should remain a major part of SL-CE pedagogies. Yet, some literature has begun to question what is meant by "collaboration" and "reciprocity," and how those terms are actually employed in SL-CE research and teaching (e.g., Dostilio, et al., 2012; Jovanovic, 2014; Saltmarsh and Hartley, 2011). For example, Jovanovic (2014) notes that "the rush to collaboration can come with a high price. In the name of efficiency...some people will urge collaboration when what they really want (but will not say) is compliance" (p. 1). According to Jovanovic, true collaboration entails:

struggling together as an ethical endeavor that signals a profound desire to interact, even when it may be difficult, [or] when we may hold opposing positions ... Struggling together may be uncomfortable, but it is that discomfort that paves the way for

necessary questions that in turn press us to (better) articulate our values and reasons for the work we do. (p. 1)

Here, Jovanovic importantly recognizes that SL-CE partnerships will not always be easy and emphasizes the process of “struggling together” through collaboration rather than collaboration as an end-point. Despite such critiques, however, many SL-CE projects continue to focus on a visible product that students create for community partners—i.e., an endpoint—while much research continues to focus on the learning outcomes of student projects rather than on the messy, collaborative processes that led to those results. This emphasis on products and results, usually from a university perspective, begs the question: How can SL-CE students, instructors, and community partners become more engaged in the “discomfort” and “struggle” that is inherent to, and indeed necessary for, greater collaboration and reciprocity?

Increased attention to collaboration as end-point in SL-CE pedagogies can obscure the disagreement and deliberation that is also inherent to and necessary for democratic processes. While many SL-CE pedagogies recognize that disagreements arise and differences exist between students, instructors, and community partners, the scholarship has not adequately addressed how to handle disagreement and difference intentionally and democratically throughout SL-CE partnerships. In an effort to address this gap, the present article puts SL-CE scholarship in conversation with theories of democratic deliberation to suggest practical frameworks for how students, partners, and instructors can disagree and negotiate difference productively. Theories of democratic deliberation emphasize that deliberation is a key component of collaborative, democratic decision-making efforts. Democratic deliberation involves “constructive, informed, and decisive dialogue about important public issues” among diverse groups of citizens that leads toward actionable decisions (Nabatchi, 2012, p. 7). As Jovanovic implies, if deliberation among students, instructors, and community members in SL-CE courses does not occur or is not made visible, then these partnerships risk compliance rather than collaboration. Indeed, the absence of visible deliberation in supposedly “collaborative” processes generally signals that a veiled power structure is preventing open exchange. Thus, as SL-CE pedagogies hold collaboration, reciprocity, and democratic education as central goals, it is crucial to more critically examine the deliberative processes through which such goals can be reached.

In what follows, this article argues that more directly engaging students in explicit, deliberative processes with community members can help SL-CE pedagogies to improve efforts at collaboration, reciprocity, and democratic education. Providing students with tools and opportunities to deliberate with community partners about shared projects can help students to become more aware of the political implications of service-learning and to build important civic skills. At the same time, more explicit deliberation among students, community partners, and instructors *throughout* service-learning projects can better ensure that these projects address both community and university agendas. The first section of this article further details the emphasis on collaboration and reciprocity in the current SL-CE scholarship as well as reviews some recent literature on democratic deliberation. Then, a brief interlude illustrates

how failure to engage students and community members in deliberation led to undemocratic decision-making in a specific community engagement undergraduate writing course. The next section argues that involving students and community partners in increased deliberation is crucial for SL-CE courses to avoid apolitical projects and non-reciprocal partnerships. This section suggests two specific deliberative processes that can be incorporated into SL-CE pedagogies—*disagreeing productively* and *negotiating expertise*—and offers five concrete suggestions for how to enact these deliberative processes with students and community members. The article concludes by suggesting some areas for further research.

### ***Reciprocity, Collaboration, and Democratic Deliberation***

Community engagement and service-learning are generally considered pedagogies that encourage civic participation and cultivate democratic ideals (Bingle & Clayton, 2012; Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich & Corngold, 2007; Steinberg, Hatcher & Bingle, 2011). Bingle and Clayton (2012) describe service-learning as the “pedagogical manifestation” of the civic engagement between universities and communities (p. 104). The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2014) defines community engagement as a pedagogy through which students, teachers, and community members exchange knowledge and resources:

The purpose of community engagement is the partnership of college and university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good. (p. 10).

This definition highlights the largely democratic mission of community engagement pedagogy: to equip students (and community partners) with democratic values and a sense of civic responsibility through active partnerships beyond the university.

The democratic roots of SL-CE pedagogies are often traced to educational philosopher John Dewey’s model of pragmatic, experiential, and democratic learning (Deans, 1999; Giles & Eyler, 1994; Saltmarsh, 1996; Saltmarsh, & Hartley, 2011) and Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy.<sup>1</sup> Viewing schools as models of democratic civic life, Dewey argued that individual educational growth should not be considered separate from social improvement, but rather that all education has social ends (Deans, 1999; Giles & Eyler, 1994; Saltmarsh, 1996). Based on his literacy education work with indigenous groups in postcolonial Brazil, Freire (1970) argued that

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<sup>1</sup> Historical precedents for community engagement and service-learning have also been traced in African American social thought and feminist social practices (Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997; Stevens, 2003). The discussion of Dewey and Freire here does not intend to privilege their contributions above others, but rather recognizes their philosophies as the most typically cited in the academic discourse on the historical roots of SL-CE pedagogies.

by learning to critically analyze their social conditions, students could enact democratic revolution.

Embracing the tradition of Dewey's and Freire's democratically-minded educational philosophies, current SL-CE pedagogies claim to improve students' civic skills and democratic sensibilities by actively engaging students with their communities and encouraging students to reflect on those experiences. Much empirical research has examined whether SL-CE contributes to increased civic participation in students (e.g., Eyler, Giles, Stenson & Gray, 2001; Jones, Segar & Gasiorski, 2008; Moely, Furco & Reed, 2008; Steinberg, Hatcher & Bringle, 2011). Janet Eyler's recent meta-analysis (2011) on service-learning's impact on student learning shows that students who participate in service-learning demonstrate increased political interest and efficacy, sense of community, and notion of social responsibility. Some research has also argued that SL-CE partnerships do not only advance students' civic sensibilities but also lead to improved civic skills for faculty, university administrators, and community members (Bringle & Clayton, 2012).

Despite these positive indicators of student learning outcomes, recent critiques have questioned whether SL-CE courses and programs are actually encouraging students to engage more actively in democratic processes and are representing truly collaborative efforts between universities and communities. Mary Kirlin (2002) argues that many service-learning programs are not designed to help students to develop key citizenship skills such as identifying problems, expressing opinions, and building consensus. She suggests that while service-learning students might experience an attitudinal shift towards increased interest in social problems, they often do not demonstrate behavioral changes that lead to increased civic engagement. Kirlin argues that "cognitive understanding of democracy is not sufficient" for students to gain increased civic skills; rather, students must actively practice skills such as monitoring public events and issues, deliberating about public policy issues, interacting with other citizens to promote personal and common interests, and influencing policy decisions on public issues (p. 574).

### **Increased Emphasis on Processes of Collaboration and Reciprocity**

The skills that Kirlin outlines are important for active participation in democratic *processes*; her attention to processes echoes other scholars' recognition that democratic collaborations are not endpoints but rather ongoing (e.g., Jovanovic, 2014; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). The Kettering Colloquium, a meeting of 33 civic engagement scholars and academic leaders held in 2008, concluded that most university civic engagement efforts, including SL-CE pedagogies, are "remarkably apolitical" as they do not "explicitly link the work of engagement to our democracy" (Saltmarsh, Hartley & Clayton, 2009, p. 5). According to Saltmarsh, Hartley and Clayton, colloquium members agreed that "democratic deliberation" is rare between universities and communities. Rather than form equitable partnerships with communities, universities tend to follow a framework that "locates the university as the center of solutions to

public problems" (p. 8). The colloquium thus called for a shift towards a discourse of reciprocity that would emphasize working *with* communities rather than *on* or *for* them:

Reciprocity signals an epistemological shift that values not only expert-knowledge that is rational, analytic and positivist but also values a different kind of rationality that is more relational, localized, and contextual and favors mutual deference between lay persons and academics. Knowledge generation is a process of co-creation, breaking down the distinctions between knowledge producers and knowledge consumers. (p. 10)

Saltmarsh, Hartley and Clayton suggest that a new paradigm of reciprocity would no longer be based on "activity" and "place"—i.e., the university *helps* communities beyond its *campus*—but rather on "processes" and "purpose"—i.e., the university and community use collaborative *processes* to *co-construct* knowledge (p. 9). In a more process-based framework "students learn cooperative and creative problem-solving within learning environments in which faculty, students, and individuals from the community work and deliberate together" (p. 10). The colloquium recognized that allowing diverse groups to deliberate together about goals and actions can help to uphold democratic decision-making in SL-CE projects and to reflect more collaborative, reciprocal efforts. Yet, the colloquium did not provide details on how such deliberation might occur and what reciprocity should exactly entail.

Six years after the Kettering Colloquium's call for a new paradigm of reciprocity, there are ample claims in the SL-CE scholarship of reciprocal projects; however, the ideal of reciprocity is not always clearly defined and scant literature has addressed how to directly engage students in deliberative processes with faculty and community members. This article contributes to the literature by juxtaposing discourses of reciprocity with theories of democratic deliberation and offering practical suggestions for increasing deliberations among students, instructors, and community members.

It is important to begin by more clearly defining the notion of 'reciprocity.' Based on their concept review of the term, as it is used in the SL-CE literature across multiple disciplines, Dostilio et al., (2012) identify three distinct "orientations" to reciprocity—exchange, influence, and generativity—that imply various levels of knowledge co-construction and collaboration between university and community members.

Exchange-orientated reciprocity refers to a partnership in which "participants give and receive something from others that they would not otherwise have" (Dostilio et al., 2012, p. 19). Examples of exchange-orientated reciprocity could include students volunteering to tutor English to non-native speakers (Hartman et al., 2014) or students creating a brochure for a non-profit organization. This type of reciprocity has been criticized for developing projects or providing services *for* rather than *with* the community and for not providing enough opportunities for students and community partners to communicate with one another (Hartmann et al., 2014; Leon & Sura, 2013).

Influence-orientated reciprocity refers to a partnership in which “the processes and/or outcomes of the collaboration are iteratively changed as a result of being influenced by the participants and their contributed ways of knowing and doing” (Dostilio et al., 2012, p. 19). In this type of reciprocal relationship, students and community member are more directly involved together in a shared project. For example, both community members and students might brainstorm ideas for a project, and then articulate and re-articulate the goals and shape of that project over a semester.

Finally, generativity-orientated reciprocity refers to a partnership in which “participants (who have or develop identities as co-creators) become and/or produce something new together that would not otherwise exist” (Dostilio et al., 2012, p. 19). This orientation to reciprocity embraces a systems-based, ecological thinking in which a partnership influences collaborators on a deeper, more interconnected level: “the purposes for enacting reciprocity suggest that the process allows for the potential that new levels of understanding can be opened up, ones that could not exist except within reciprocal relationality to each other” (Dostilio et al., 2012, p. 25). In other words, generativity-orientated reciprocity allows for participants not just to work together but rather to transform their ways of thinking, doing and being through the partnership. Such partnerships tend to evolve as one project leads to the idea for another and a more sustained relationship can be built over time.

Dostilio et al., do not privilege one orientation over another, but rather urge scholars and practitioners to more clearly define which approach they employ, a point with which I agree. Increased opportunities for deliberation and disagreement between students, instructors, and community partners in SL-CE courses are necessary to reach reciprocity on any of these levels. Indeed, any orientation to reciprocity is hard to reach if opportunities for deliberation are absent from the partnership, which is often the problem with exchange-orientated approaches. For example, Leon and Sura (2013) suggest that local non-profit organizations often become fatigued by product-driven, exchange-orientated projects that do not significantly contribute to their missions and organizations. Leon and Sura recall their encounter with the volunteer coordinator at their university who tells them starkly: “We don’t need any more brochures” (p. 60). Based on their assessment that too many SL-CE partnerships are merely concerned with creating something “public”—a deliverable that serves as “proof that we were here and that we did something”—Leon and Sura suggest shifting the focus of SL-CE to a more inquiry-based approach in which students do not produce a “public” deliverable (p. 63).

While I agree that product-driven, exchange-orientated approaches can be problematic if the students merely create something *for* a partner (without a critical understanding of that community or how their deliverable fits within it), I disagree that exchange-orientated approaches are not useful. Some organizations rely on and appreciate exchange-orientated partnerships in which students create a deliverable for the community partner that the partner might not have the time or resources to produce (Dostilio et al., p. 27). Rather, the problem with exchange-orientated projects often stems from the fact that not enough forums for deliberation exist among instructors, students, and community members to decide together on

the nature of the project and deliverable. Increased opportunities for deliberation could mean that many SL-CE projects become more influence and generativity-orientated, in which students and community members work together iteratively. However, the specific parameters of some projects—i.e., time constraints, needs of the community partner, etc.—might preclude influence and generativity-orientated approaches. Thus, my argument for increased deliberation is not to advocate only for influence and generativity-orientated reciprocity. Rather, I suggest that it is necessary for deliberation to occur more frequently among students, instructors, and community members in order to make decisions together about project parameters and goals in order for any of these reciprocal processes to occur. The important questions remain, however: how can democratic deliberation be incorporated into already-busy SL-CE classrooms and projects, and what should this deliberation look like? Before addressing these questions in the next half of the article, it is important to define democratic deliberation.

## Democratic Deliberation

Democratic deliberation is a difficult concept to precisely pin-down: there are many types and processes of democratic deliberation that are increasingly theorized and studied by researchers in numerous fields and practiced by professionals in various public arenas (Nabatchi, 2012). In this article, I use the definition of deliberation given in Nabatchi, Gastil, Weiksner, and Leighninger's comprehensive edited volume on the topic, *Democracy in Motion* (2012). In the introduction to this volume, Nabatchi defines deliberation as the "thoughtful and reasoned consideration of information, views, experiences, and ideas among a group of individuals" that leads to a "well-reasoned solution" to a shared problem (p. 6). While deliberation can happen in the private sphere between family members or friends, deliberation in the public sphere "requires that a diverse group of participants take part in an open and accessible process of reasoned discussion" in which "all participants receive an adequate opportunity to speak, fulfill an obligation to listen attentively and consider carefully the contributions of other participants, and treat each other with respect" (p. 7). Terms like dialogue are often used to describe deliberative processes; however, dialogue and deliberation are not the same. Dialogue refers to the process of discussing issues with a goal toward understanding and learning, while deliberation emphasizes coming to a decision that will lead towards action and change (D & D Resources, 2008; D & D Resources, 2009). Thus, while dialogue can be an important part of deliberation, deliberation maintains different goals. As all three orientations to reciprocity maintain goals of action on some level, I advocate specifically for deliberation rather than dialogue here.

Mapping the current literature on democratic deliberation, Matt Leighninger (2012) outlines four main characteristics of effective, civic deliberations, which: (a) involve a diverse, representative group of citizens; (b) include structured, small-group discussions, often face-to-face or online; (c) give participants the opportunity to compare values, experiences, policy options, arguments, and information; and (d) facilitate dialogue towards real outcomes and

actions (p. 20). A crucial component underlying these characteristics is the opportunity for participants not only to acknowledge disagreement, but more importantly to *disagree productively* by comparing and attempting to understand different viewpoints, and engaging in dialogue that can lead to real actions. Also highlighting the generative quality of disagreement, Black (2012) notes that during civic deliberation, “disagreements can be a useful way for...different perspectives to come to light. Disagreements can also help participants understand the trade-offs required for any one solution to be workable” (p. 66). Disagreeing during deliberation has been found to expand participants’ perspectives of others’ viewpoints, their ability to recognize the reasons why some people might disagree with them, and their tolerance of different viewpoints (Mutz, 2002; Price, Cappella & Nir, 2002).

Colby et al., (2007) suggest that teaching effective deliberation includes making sure that students understand argument, listen carefully, consider competing claims, and look for common ground (p. 157-161). These skills are necessary for helping students to recognize that disagreements are not to be avoided but rather can lead to collective decision-making and democratic action when conducted in certain ways. Productive disagreement and deliberation—i.e., using disagreements to lead to collective decisions and actions—is a useful process for SL-CE projects in which disagreements will inevitably arise and actions should ideally be based on collaborative decision-making. Thus, it is important for SL-CE pedagogies to develop concrete ways in which to help students to learn and practice productive disagreement skills. If opportunities are not given for enough deliberation and disagreement among students, community partners, and instructors in SL-CE partnerships, then it is difficult to achieve any type of reciprocity in which both students and community partners gain valuable experiences, deliverables, and civic skills. The following brief interlude provides an illustrative example of such a failed attempted at reciprocity, resulting from lack of structured deliberation in a SL-CE introductory writing course.

### **Interlude**

Imagine the following scene: It is the last day of class for my community engagement, introductory writing course. The students and I have invited members of the local community to a “premiere” viewing of a documentary the class produced that highlights the unique, multi-generational, and historical characteristics of a neighborhood close to campus. As the neighborhood had been embroiled in land-use controversies with city government, developers, and the university over the past few years, our community partner (a neighborhood association leader), the students, and I decided that the documentary would respond to the mainly negative press that the neighborhood had received recently by highlighting only the positive aspects of the neighborhood. The film does not address the recent land-use controversies at all. Our community partner is hopeful that the documentary will be housed on the neighborhood association’s website and stand out as a positive representation of why the neighborhood is still a great place to live.

Now, imagine the uncomfortable looks on my students' faces when, after we show the film, several members of the neighborhood begin to express their dissatisfaction that the documentary "glosses over" and "ignores" the neighborhood's controversies.

"Where is the journalistic integrity, here?" one community member asks. "Don't you have an obligation to show the negative aspects of the neighborhood if you want to depict what it is really like to live here?"

"I disagree!" proclaims another neighbor. "This documentary highlights the nice parts of our neighborhood, which is exactly what we need right now—some positive press."

As several neighbors begin to debate the merits and drawbacks of our documentary's approach, I see that my students are not prepared for the possibility that some people will disagree with their work. They are squirming a bit in their chairs, clearly unsure how to respond. As their instructor, I wonder: "Where did I go wrong? How could I have better prepared my students for the inevitable disagreement that comes with community-engaged discourse, and helped them to deliberate effectively with the neighbors concerning the best way to depict the neighborhood?" I know that the students have well-supported reasons for depicting the neighborhood in this way, and that they have a good understanding of the land-use situation developed through interviews with neighbors and research papers they wrote on the issues. My students, however, are speechless.

These thoughts come quite a bit too late. It is the last day of class and there is no time to prepare my students to exchange their views productively with the neighbors. Ultimately, through deliberative efforts *after* the semester, our community partner, the other neighbors, and I agree that the documentary should go up on the neighborhood association's website and another documentary detailing the controversies can be made down the line. Thus, the student's deliverable is finally a success, in a sense. Yet, my students did not have the opportunity to engage in the deliberative processes surrounding that final product, leading me to wonder: Did the students leave the course with any improved civic skills? Did the documentary truly represent a collaborative effort between students and community members?

### ***Deliberation as Crucial for SL-CE Pedagogies***

As this brief interlude illustrates, SL-CE courses and projects will inevitably encounter disagreements among students, community partners, and instructors concerning how to co-construct knowledge, identify common goals, and enact positive change together. If community engagement is to encourage civic participation and to cultivate civic skills in students, and to reach a reciprocal relationship with community partners in the process (whether that reciprocity is exchange, influence, or generativity-orientated), then including both students and community members in deliberative processes that address such disagreements is crucial.

Indeed, most SL-CE projects do include some kind of negotiations regarding project parameters and scope. However, students and community members are not always involved in such negotiations as they often occur between the instructor and one or two community partners before the course begins. Also, these negotiations usually do not transpire as formal deliberations but rather take the form of more casual meetings or email exchanges. I am arguing here for more structured opportunities for deliberation that include as many participants involved in the project as possible. Inadequate opportunities for democratic deliberation in SL-CE projects can have serious repercussions. At best, projects that do not include students directly in deliberation with community members miss the opportunity to help students to improve the civic abilities identified by Kirlin (2002), such as the ability to deliberate about important issues and to promote common interests with other citizens. At worst, failure to incorporate deliberative processes among faculty, students, and community members in SL-CE projects ignores different types of expertise, experience, and viewpoints, thus enforcing an unequal power structure and lack of reciprocity, usually in favor of the faculty and/or students.

These repercussions can happen inadvertently and even when current SL-CE best practices are followed, as was the case in the course described in the interlude. This course followed current best practices of SL-CE such as contracts between students and the community partner outlining clear expectations for the project, ample reflective writing in which students connected their service with course material, students working beyond the classroom with community members, and frequent communication between the partner and students throughout the semester. The course aimed for an exchange and influence-orientated reciprocal approach, in that it was designed so that students would ultimately provide the neighborhood with a documentary (exchange-reciprocity) while the students and neighbors would also work together, through in-person interviews, to exchange ideas and information regarding the neighborhood and the shape of the documentary (influence-reciprocity).

Yet, these SL-CE best practices did not help the project to reach its ideals of reciprocity or to prepare students for productively addressing disagreements among project participants. Part of the problem stemmed from the fact that not enough deliberative forums were set up to include numerous neighbors and students in decision-making efforts regarding the partnership. The documentary project had emerged from my own work with the neighborhood association the previous semester—an influence-orientated reciprocal project—in which several neighbors and I, while conducting research on how other neighborhoods had fought land-use battles, noticed the need for some positive media about this particular neighborhood. Thus, the idea for a positive documentary, focused on the historical, architectural and social characteristics of the neighborhood, was born. The next semester, as the instructor of an introductory writing course, I took the initiative to carry this idea on with my students and to negotiate its parameters with the neighborhood association. While the larger neighborhood association had agreed to the general idea of the documentary before the semester began, it seemed to make sense at the time for the class to mainly communicate with one individual from the association concerning logistics throughout the semester. Thus, this one individual

and I negotiated the specific project parameters—e.g., timeline and scope—before the course began. Throughout the semester, students contacted this individual directly with updates on their progress and questions about the documentary’s content and tone. Students actively engaged with other members of the neighborhood by filming interviews with them to create content for the documentary. In these interviews, students and neighbors discussed their viewpoints and experiences regarding the land use controversies and general ideas concerning the documentary. Students and neighbors did not, however, deliberate together in one space concerning specific design elements of the film—i.e., stance, tone, images, music, etc. Such specific questions regarding the design details of the documentary were reserved for the main contact individual.

While this communication model simplified the interaction between the class and the community partner, it did not adequately recognize the differences of viewpoints, experiences, and expertise of the project’s larger stakeholders, nor emphasize processes of deliberation to allow those differences to be aired out productively. Most of the neighbors who disagreed with the documentary’s positive tone at the premiere were individuals whose homes had been lost to commercial rezoning in the land use battles. Because they did not deliberate with these individuals throughout the documentary’s production process, students did not have the opportunity to explore the roots of these neighbors’ viewpoints or to attempt to truly understand their experiences and incorporate them into the film. As the documentary was not unveiled to a majority of neighbors until the premiere at the end of the semester, the project ultimately committed a common error of exchange-orientated approaches: we presented the film as a deliverable *for* the neighborhood rather than embracing processes of reciprocity and collaboration to produce that deliverable *with* the neighborhood. While the course followed many SL-CE best practices, it missed the chance to cultivate students’ deliberative skills and civic sensibilities by not including more opportunities for neighbors and students to deliberate together. Furthermore, because of the lack of deliberation, the documentary did not represent a true, reciprocal collaboration with a representative sample of the community and students. While the students did “exchange” a documentary with the neighbors, the neighbors did not receive a deliverable that the majority wanted, and the students did not receive an improvement of civic skills from the experience.

### **Disagreeing Productively and Negotiating Expertise**

To avoid such inadvertent misses at reciprocity and democratic education, more specific pedagogical attention is needed regarding how to incorporate democratic deliberation into SL-CE classrooms. Various models from the scholarship on deliberative democracy exist for teaching deliberation in the classroom and coordinating deliberative events in the community (e.g., Colby, et al., 2007; Hanson & Howe, 2011). While most current deliberative models do not explicitly address SL-CE classrooms, they can help to identify processes for incorporating deliberation more explicitly and purposefully into SL-CE courses, specifically processes of *disagreeing productively* and *negotiating expertise*. These processes address two current

problems that can prevent reciprocal exchanges in SL-CE partnerships, which are discussed in turn below.

### ***Disagreeing Productively***

The SL-CE literature shows that community stakeholders, university affiliates, and other groups often do not agree on the processes, goals, and scope of shared projects (McEachern, 2001; Rumsey & Nihiser, 2011; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). Failure to acknowledge and work through disagreement can lead to a lack of mutual understanding among students, instructors, and community partners (Rumsey & Nihiser, 2011; Tryon, Hilgendorf & Scott, 2009). Students often find it difficult to address the disagreements that arise during their work with community members, particularly when numerous stakeholders are involved (Anson & Forsberg, 1990; McEachern, 2001; Rumsey & Nihiser, 2011). Furthermore, students often do not anticipate that disagreements will exist *among* community members, thinking instead of their community partners as a relatively homogenous group, as was the case in my course: students assumed that because our main contact individual approved of their film that the rest of the neighbors would as well (Link et al., 2011). Despite the prevalence of disagreement noted in the literature, SL-CE projects do not always afford opportunities for such disagreements to be addressed or resolved collaboratively and productively.

Structured deliberation is necessary to resolve such disagreements among a diverse group of participants and to decide on which course of action a given project should take. As Leighninger (2012) and Black (2102) note, airing out disagreements in public deliberations can help participants to weigh and balance possible solutions, compare values and experiences, and come to shared decisions. In other words, participants must have the opportunity to *disagree productively*. If disagreements are not addressed together in SL-CE projects, then any type of reciprocity is difficult to achieve.

### ***Negotiating Expertise***

Another related, major challenge in SL-CE courses is the negotiation of varying levels and types of expertise. Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton (2009) argue that most SL-CE projects place students in roles of "proto-experts who will be able to perform civic tasks in and on communities that they work with because they will have the knowledge and credentials to know what to do to help communities improve" (p. 8). The authors suggest that placing student in an "expert" role encourages "expert-informed knowledge application" rather than "collaborative knowledge construction" that also recognizes the expertise of community members. This top-down approach can result from "expert" roles being assumed rather than negotiated. For example, in retrospect, it is clear to me that the project structure assumed in my course delineated distinct roles of "expertise." As the instructor, I took on the "expert" role of setting up the project in the beginning of the semester and incorporating it into the course syllabus; the students took on the "expert" role of researching, writing, filming, designing, and editing the documentary; and the neighbors were placed in the "expert" role of providing content regarding the history of the neighborhood and the land use controversies. These

clearly defined roles did not allow for the iterative evolution of project ideas and did not provide enough opportunities for participants to disagree regarding aspects of the project not included in their area of "expertise." For example, as the interlude describes, the students were surprised when neighbors disagreed with the style and tone of the documentary, an area of the students' "expertise" in documentary design.

Situating students as "proto- experts" in this way not only discourages reciprocity but also can create confusion as to whose expertise matters, and in which contexts. Students in service-learning projects often struggle to negotiate the expertise and authority of their university instructors regarding course material with the expertise and authority of community members in contexts beyond the classroom, particularly when types of knowledge seem to conflict across spaces (Anson & Forsberg, 1990; Link, et al., 2011). For example, Anson and Forsberg (1990) found that professional writing students interning at community organizations were often conflicted about whether to trust the expertise of their instructors or their superiors at the internship, and were hesitant to offer their university-based knowledge in their internship settings. This hesitancy and confusion were also apparent in my class: students were confused at the documentary premiere when the neighbors challenged their design and style decisions regarding the documentary, as the students had been placed in the role of "proto" expert regarding design and had viewed the community members as experts in neighborhood information only. Thus, the students were hesitant to defend their design decisions when challenged by neighbors at the premiere. They were not prepared to *negotiate expertise* by weighing their knowledge of documentary design with neighbors' viewpoints. Had we deliberated with more of the neighbors about design decisions earlier in the semester, we would have realized that many of the neighbors also had expertise in and desire to be a part of those decisions.

## Practical Strategies

Deliberative processes of *disagreeing productively* and *negotiating expertise* can be incorporated into SL-CE classrooms and projects through the following five strategies: (a) including various stakeholders in open forums, (b) preparing students for deliberation and disagreement with position papers, (c) deliberating to define terms, (d) adapting current best practices from SL-CE pedagogies, and (e) addressing participation bias explicitly.

### *Including Various Stakeholders in Open Forums*

One way to allow for more productive disagreement and negotiation of expertise in SL-CE courses is to provide more opportunities for formal deliberation among numerous stakeholders of a given project. As Leighniger (2012) suggests, effective deliberations should include diverse participants. Deliberations about the parameters of an SL-CE project will become more reciprocal and collaborative when various participants are involved. Students and community partners can deliberate about the parameters of a project through open forum discussions such as "town hall" style meetings and discussion circles, in which instructors and

students meet in a classroom, community center, or other public space to discuss goals, questions, and project ideas in small groups. When time and space constraints are a concern, these open forums can also take place online in shared blogs or discussion forums. Small groups are useful for ensuring that all participants are afforded an opportunity to speak, another important criteria for effective deliberations (Leighninger, 2012). After the small groups have deliberated a question or issue, these groups can reconvene to discuss those issues with the larger forum. Instructors, community members, and even students who have reviewed facilitation strategies and who are effective leaders, can facilitate such small group discussions. Online resources such as the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (ncdd.org) provide strategies for leading and organizing such forums.

It is important to emphasize that such forums must include numerous representatives of the community and students in order to ensure that multiple viewpoints can emerge in one space. For example, while my students interacted with many of the neighbors, they did so by interviewing one or two neighbors at a time. Thus, there was not an opportunity for diverse neighbors and students to deliberate in a shared forum until the documentary premiere. Also, while students were exposed to multiple viewpoints through the interviews and had the chance to dialogue with neighbors, they did not have the opportunity to organize these conversations into shared action points or decisions, leading to incorrect assumptions regarding expertise and failure to incorporate the majority of the neighbors' perspectives.

To avoid such misses at reciprocity, open forums should be structured as formal deliberations in which deliberations among community members and neighbors lead to specific decisions and action-points. Deliberation does not simply entail airing out differences but is rather "a process of talking and listening with the express purpose of building relationships and fostering mutual understanding" (Thomas & Levine, 2012, p. 159). Building relationships means finding a shared base of information and identifying the values at stake (Black, 2012). Informal dialogues or discussions with only a few participants do not lead to the same outcomes as structured deliberations. In order to identify values and come to mutual understanding, open forums might begin with 'big picture' questions, such as "why is this project important to you and to your community?" An appointed student or community leader can record the talking-points and action-points that emerge from the deliberation on such questions.

### ***Preparing Students for Deliberation and Disagreement with Position Papers***

Students can prepare for productive disagreement in open forums by researching various stakeholder concerns, analyzing potential biases and assumptions underlying these concerns, and developing informed arguments in position papers, written before they engage in formal deliberations with community members. Such position papers can help students to practice important civic, deliberative skills of looking for common ground, considering competing claims, and forming arguments (Colby, 2007). The papers can also provide a springboard for negotiating expertise with community members, when shared at open forums. Students can share their position papers in abbreviated form, through posters or presentations, in order to communicate clearly their understanding of the issues at stake to community members and to

open up deliberations regarding differences in opinion on those issues. After an open forum, students might write a reflective paper that outlines what positions they encountered at the forum, how their own opinions have changed or not, and what decisions and shared action points were decided.

Position papers can help not only to ensure that students enter deliberations as informed participants, an important aspect of effective deliberations, but also to identify and negotiate differences in expertise and knowledge among student and community participants (Nabatchi, 2012). In my course, for example, had students prepared and shared position papers with community members, we might have realized earlier in the semester that several community members desired to be a part of documentary design decisions because they viewed those decisions as directly related to the political controversies in the neighborhood. Position papers, and corresponding deliberations, could have also helped the students to better understand why these neighbors felt so strongly that the documentary should take a more overt political stance.

### ***Deliberating to Define Terms***

Black (2012) notes that “stakeholders’ language choices and the varied meanings of terminology used” can greatly affect how participants in deliberations understand or misunderstand one another (p. 72). She argues that facilitators of group deliberations play a key role in “introducing shared terminology [and] asking participants to define their terms” (p. 72). Disagreements in SL-CE projects often occur because of differences in communication practices and knowledge production among students, faculty, and community members (McEachern, 2001; Rumsey & Nihiser, 2011; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). Different types of knowledge and expertise are not usually *incompatible* but rather communicated *ineffectively*. Thus, defining terms and finding common language is an important process for collaboration between university SL-CE courses and community partners.

In order to help students and community members develop a common language, instructors can encourage students in class to identify and analyze terminology specific to the academic discipline of their SL-CE course through word maps and to juxtapose these disciplinary word maps with maps of terms important to their community project. Maps can include both definitions of words as well as lines of connection between terms and points of discrepancy on meanings. At open forums, students can share these word maps with community partners and deliberate with them to reach shared definitions. Using word maps as a springboard for such deliberations can help students and community partners to consider how certain words reflect the various types of expertise, values, and knowledge held by partners, students, and instructors. An open forum between students and community members might also begin with a facilitator introducing a word important to the project and asking small groups to deliberate about its definition and to negotiate on a shared meaning.

For example, in my course, there was some discrepancy on the term “documentary.” The students and I understood that we were making a more objective film about neighborhood

character and history, while many neighbors wanted a more expose style film that had an overt political stance. At an open forum for my course, we might have begun by deliberating about the meaning of the word "documentary." Deliberating about this term with community members could have helped to ensure that the final documentary represented both students and community definitions of that term. Activities such as these can not only help students to communicate more effectively with partners but can also help them to explore the epistemologies of an academic field and to critically consider how knowledge is defined, shared, adapted, communicated and/or mis-communicated across disciplinary and public spaces.

### ***Adapting Current Best Practices from SL-CE Pedagogies***

A common SL-CE best practice is for students and community partners to sign a contract before a project begins that establishes the parameters of their project and the expectations of students and community partners. While useful in their own right, such contracts do not always allow for the unexpected disagreements that will arise over the course of a project or for the negotiation of expertise. Contracts are often negotiated between students and a single contact person; thus, they usually do not reflect a reciprocal effort of numerous stakeholders. The negotiation of contracts, however, offers an ideal opportunity for democratic deliberation among students, instructors, and community members to occur, not only at the beginning of SL-CE projects but also throughout the semester. To ensure that contracts represent the collaboration of multiple, diverse stakeholders, they can be drawn up based on agreements and action-points reached when students and community members deliberate at open forums. Contracts can include a list of shared terms that students, instructors, and community members have deliberated about and reached agreement upon. Contracts can be publicized to multiple community members by posting them on shared blogs or sending them through shared listservs. Community members and students can revisit contracts at various predetermined check-points throughout the semester to discuss whether students, instructors, and community partners are fulfilling their responsibilities to the project and to re-negotiate certain parameters of the project based on shifting conditions.

Another way for students to critically work through communication differences among SL-CE stakeholders' is through the reflective writing already common to SL-CE pedagogies. SL-CE pedagogies maintain that reflection encourages students to understand their community experiences in relation to course material and to critically examine their own beliefs and experiences with regards to the service-learning context (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999). Performed consistently throughout a project, reflection can also help students to identify where communication among community partners, university discourses, and their own knowledge and experience seems to conflict or converge. For example, in their reflective writing, students can notice differences in communication patterns and terminology used in the classroom and in the community, identifying terms used by community members that they did not understand and analyzing instances when communication seemed to break down in deliberations with community partners. Students can then build from these moments of miscommunication to improve shared communication practices.

For example, my students might have noticed the differences in various neighbors' points of view regarding the land use controversies and their perception of the function and meaning of the term "documentary" had I asked them to specifically reflect on communication patterns after an open forum with the neighbors. I noted at the premiere that neighbors who had lost their homes in the land use controversies were understandably more defensive in their communication regarding the documentary. Reflective writing could have helped students to analyze and understand these neighbors' defensive stances.

### **Addressing Participation Bias Explicitly**

Critiques of deliberative democracy argue that deliberative situations can promote dominant modes of rational, linear conversation and can lead to participation bias favoring advantaged groups and limiting the participation of marginalized individuals based on gender, class, cultural, or racial differences (Siu & Stanisevski, 2012). At the same time, deliberating within diverse groups has been found to encourage understanding and respect of different viewpoints and experiences among participants (e.g., Price, Cappella & Nir, 2002). It is important to explicitly address the possibility of participation bias with SL-CE students before they engage in deliberation with community partners. Instructors can facilitate critical discussions with students regarding potential areas of bias resulting from differences in race, gender, class, and varying types of expertise and communication practices. Students can also explore participation bias in their position papers by clearly articulating their own positions regarding the project. Asking students to critically examine the possibility of participation bias can help them to avoid such biases when deliberating with community members. Such critical examination and direct deliberation with individuals different from themselves can also help students to avoid a noblesse oblige approach to SL-CE, in which community members are viewed as victims in need of "saving" by university experts.

Another strategy to prevent participation bias during deliberations is to make sure that participants are equally informed of the specific politics and issues at stake (Siu & Stanisevski, 2012). Instructors can make sure that students have a thorough understanding of root causes of differences and inequalities surrounding a project before deliberating with community members. Position papers can help students to develop this understanding—for example, position papers could have helped my students to more formally articulate their own opinions regarding the land use controversies, which they could then have compared with those of the neighbors at an open forum. At deliberative events, instructors and community leaders can also make sure that participants begin from shared levels of understanding by preparing and distributing briefing materials on key issues and airing out differences in opinion regarding these issues.

### **Scope of Deliberation**

The scope of these deliberative strategies will vary according to project timelines, logistics, and orientation to reciprocity; however, deliberations should occur at various points throughout

the course of a shared project. For example, in an exchange-orientated approach to my course, we might have held an open forum to discuss the project parameters at the beginning of the semester. At this meeting, students could have shared position papers, written in advance, regarding their understanding of the land use controversies with community members. This forum would have provided the deliberative space for students and community members to decide on the shape, tone, and goals of the documentary and to decide who would like to be involved in the project and how. After the forum, students could have reflected on the deliberations at the forum and written up a contract to be approved by community members. Then, the students could have shared drafts of the documentary with various neighbors throughout the semester, and another open forum could have been set up before the final draft was finished in order to deliberate and make shared decisions on revisions. This structure would require a minimum amount of involvement from community members, but also ensure that their opinions regarding the shape of the documentary were incorporated. This level of community involvement could have been negotiated and decided at the initial open forum.

In an influence or generativity-orientated approach, we might have also begun with an open forum to discuss project goals and scope. If that deliberation concluded that community members wanted more involvement in the direct production of the film, then we might have set up committees made of both community members and students to work on various aspects of the documentary. We might have also scheduled additional “workshop” style town halls in which students and community members worked together on the project. While this would be a considerably greater time commitment for community members, it would also have allowed for more direct involvement and interaction between students and community members, allowing for more influence and generativity among participants. The key is that this level of involvement and negotiation of expertise would have been decided on together through formal deliberations among community members and students rather than simply assumed.

## Implications and Further Directions

This article has argued that SL-CE students can and should become more involved in deliberative processes with instructors and community members in order to develop and practice key democratic decision-making skills and to engage in more collaborative, reciprocal partnerships. As deliberation is an important aspect of democratic decision-making, more opportunities for deliberation in SL-CE projects can help to avoid unequal collaborations among students, instructors, and community members. The current SL-CE literature, however, does not adequately address the importance of deliberation for SL-CE projects or provide best practices for how to incorporate deliberative processes into SL-CE courses. Drawing from theories of democratic deliberation, this article has offered some concrete suggestions for encouraging increased deliberation among multiple, diverse stakeholders of SL-CE partnerships.

These suggestions, however, are drawn from pedagogies developed for teaching deliberative democracy and from theories of democratic deliberation; they have not been tested in specifically SL-CE contexts and are thus limited. More research is necessary to determine the efficacy of such practices in SL-CE courses. Also, more research is needed to better understand how deliberative processes are currently conducted and employed in SL-CE partnerships. Such research can help to identify areas in which deliberation is already happening and how, as well as where it is lacking. For example, research on how SL-CE students currently attempt to negotiate difference and address disagreement in SL-CE projects can help researchers to identify how SL-CE pedagogies can enhance the deliberative instincts that students already possess. Finally, future research can study the need for deliberation from community partners' viewpoints: what kind of deliberation do community members view as necessary for SL-CE projects to occur more collaboratively?

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