Unheard Voices

Community Organizations and Service Learning

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Who Is Served by Service Learning?

Every year, tens of thousands of college students make their way into the community in the name of service learning. They tutor, paint, serve soup, build databases, conduct surveys, organize meetings, run errands, and all manner of other things. Many of them, maybe even the majority, do it to meet a college or university graduation requirement, to receive course credit, or both.

Service learning has now become an institutionalized practice in higher education. From small community colleges to the most prestigious PhD-granting institutions, the practice of sending students into communities that are defined as disadvantaged has become a part of the curriculum and even the requirements of an increasing number of higher education institutions. A lot of institutional hype accompanies these students, and much research promotes the positive impact the practice has on student grades, attitudes, and sensitivities (Lansverk, 2004; Ender et al., 2000; Mooney and Edwards, 2001; Myers-Lipton, 1998; Parker-Gwin and Mabry, 1998; Krain and Nurse, 2004).

There are also claims of the positive impact that service learning has on communities but, as we find, there is much less research to back up those claims (Cruz and Giles, 2000). Consequently, making service

learning work for communities may be easier said than done. Finding the right fit between student, agency, and institution is like a huge 3-D jigsaw puzzle. When it works, luck is as important as planning. Elizabeth Tryon (Beth) is a community partner specialist at Edgewood College:

> Recently, an old friend who is head of a community agency called to ask if I knew of any students that would be able to help carry out a grant-funded neighborhood survey for a community project, with a lot of flexibility in scheduling and a small stipend. It was important to him that I focus on recruiting students of color, as the survey would take place in a diverse neighborhood and he felt that respondents would be more comfortable talking to someone that reflected their diversity. And he said, of course it would be too much to ask, but if they spoke even a bit of Spanish, that would be invaluable in some of the neighborhoods. I couldn't think of anyone off the top of my head that was looking for an internship but said I'd post the opportunity on the board.
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> I hung up the phone and ten minutes later a student-friend walked into the office and said, "I need a job! But only part-time, and the hours have to be flexible!" And . . . he's a bilingual Latino. Hello—this was my lucky day. I gave him the phone number of the agency and he called immediately to take the job. When I got home from work there was a message from my agency friend, basically amazed that I had found someone that fit his dream list so fast.
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> Usually it's much harder to make that perfect match. I'm on the board of a fledgling nonprofit that heavily relies on field students each semester, particularly with their Youth Court, which keeps young offenders out of the system for first minor offenses by trying them by a jury of their peers. I had put out a call in the Social Science Department, but not heard back from anyone. The executive director was scrambling for assistance, as the program was taking off—what to do? I can't force students to take specific internships; the work has to fit their needs, too.

> I followed up again with a faculty member I'd already bugged twice. She said she'd like to help, but assumed this organization didn't have an MSW-qualified supervisor for her students, which was a requirement in her field. I called the board president and found out she is degreed and licensed in social work. When I e-mailed the faculty member, she said, "Good to know—I'll keep that in mind for the future; all my practicum are already placed this semester." The next day she called and said, "Guess what? A new transfer student just walked in and wants an internship now! And she's interested in legal work, particularly juveniles."

Those lucky connections are rare and sometimes take months to find. It's also a time-intensive process, which is certainly a problem for faculty when there is no community partner liaison to help them make matches.

Consequently, there has been growing dissatisfaction among many people both inside and outside the service learning movement since the 1990s, particularly when it comes to the issue of whether service learning truly serves communities. In the worst cases, analysts saw poor communities exploited as free sources of student education (Eby, 1998). Others worried that the "charity" model of service learning reinforced negative stereotypes and students' perceptions of poor communities as helpless (Morton, 1995; Kahne and Westheimer, 1996; Brown, 2001; Marullo and Edwards, 2000; Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2000). And then there was the concern that the connection between what was happening in the classroom and what was happening in the community was tenuous at best (Eyler and Giles, 1999).

These perceived problems with service learning might be traced to its explosion in the 1980s, influenced by higher education faculty and administrators who were distressed by the increasingly self-centered conservatism of their students (Hutchison, 2001). They believed that finding ways to confront students with actual poor people would help reverse the trend, and service learning began to focus on changing students rather than changing communities. There is nothing wrong with wanting to illuminate college students about the real world before they graduate and venture out into it unprepared, never forced to

confront the externalities of the status quo and thus becoming part of the problem. It is also valid to be perturbed with the disconnect between young people privileged enough to attend college and the people of the disinvested communities in which they volunteer. We agree with the view that, because of the status and resources allocated to higher education, those who receive and provide higher education have an obligation to redress the consequences of such inequality.

What we disagree with is the lack of attention given to the question of whether service learning is in fact impacting inequality at the community level in ways that empower community members and build capacity in community organizations. Despite this seemingly common-sensical notion of evaluating the community impact of service learning, the bias in focus toward student outcomes has continued to this day, producing a voluminous literature (Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2000). Indeed, some writers promote service learning for students with little to no consideration of its impact on communities (Reed et al., 2005; Fitch, 2005; Metz and Youniss, 2003; Honnet and Poulson, 1989). In contrast, while lip service is paid to the importance of community outcomes (Jones, 2003; Kellogg Commission, 1999; Campus Compact, 2003), there are only a handful of studies that look at community impact and community perceptions of service learning (Cruz and Giles, 2000), and these studies have seldom asked the community to help define what community impact should be. While Cruz and Giles (2000) attribute the lack of research on community outcomes of service learning to theoretical and methodological problems, it is equally plausible that the neglect of community impact is a result of the biased focus on serving and changing students, which creates a self-perpetuating cycle.

This inequity in research focus might seem logical from the academic perspective, since faculty are rewarded, administrators are promoted, and funding is provided to both public and private institutions based on the satisfaction of their "customer base"—the student. Evaluations and assessments of almost every facet of academic progress are done, from accreditation self-studies, to program reviews, to conferences focusing on best practices, and so forth. And while those evaluations are increasingly asking institutions to document their community engagement, they are not yet asking them to document their community impact. As a result, the reporting of community service is done

from within the institution rather than from outside of it. The consequence of this self-contemplation by institutions of higher education is that the voice of community organization staff and community members mostly goes unheard.

Given the lack of commitment to assessing service learning's impact on communities and community organizations, we feel compelled to ask the question: Who is served by service learning? The hallmark of an evolved view of higher learning is the willingness to look at issues from different angles with an open mind and change course where appropriate to ensure the sustainability of the practice. This volume seeks to at least partially redress the neglect of research on the community impact of service learning.

A Paucity of Past Research

We do not know much about community reactions to service learning. The little bit of research that is available concludes that community organizations are relatively satisfied with the service that they receive (Vernon and Ward, 1999; Ferrari and Worrall, 2000; Birdsall, 2005). For the most part, however, the research on satisfaction has remained at a relatively superficial level, using Likert Scale questionnaires or focus groups.

The lack of in-depth substantive research on the community impact of service learning is illustrated by the famous work of Cruz and Giles (2000) that found numerous claims regarding the benefits of service learning to the community, but little substantiation of those claims and no mention of the challenges. One of the few studies that focused in-depth on community perceptions of service learning, which also happened to be one of the rare rural studies done, surveyed sixty-five rural nonprofit organization directors and then conducted follow-up interviews with thirty of them. The research found that the directors were overwhelmingly pleased with their service learning outcomes. However, they also found that student schedules, short-term commitment, and training needs created challenges that were compounded by lack of communication with their supervising faculty (Vernon and Ward, 1999).

The issue of communication between community and academy also appears in other research by Birdsall (2005) and Jones (2003), and can

be seen as an indicator of an important underlying problem with the service learning model that nonprofits may not have been asked about in earlier research. The lack of communication can be so profound that some organizations do not distinguish between service learning and community service (Birdsall, 2005), and they do not understand that service learning is supposedly connected to course content, learning objectives, and grading.

There is also some suggestion that there are important cultural differences between the community and academy. Bacon (2002), using separate focus groups of community organization staff and faculty, identified a cultural divide between those from the community and higher education sides of the relationship. In short, organization staff members are more willing to view themselves as learners, to link learning to action, and to see learning as a collective activity. Faculty seem more inclined to think of themselves as the experts—the keepers of the knowledge that they will impart to the students or the agencies with whom they are partnering (Bacon, 2002). This has important implications for how supervising faculty and community organizations communicate with each other. Jones (2003) argues that communities often are not recognized as having their own expertise to offer in the relationship. Could this be an academic prejudice toward PhD-holding faculty, and an assumption that anyone without an advanced degree running a nonprofit can't have a comparable amount of knowledge about his or her own work? Is that why community organization staff are asked to provide training and education for students without any remuneration for their time? Does that explain why professors still provide little to no training for students before sending them out to the community? And does that attitude bode well for a partnership where knowledge gained through experience with an issue is often more important than just reading about it?

These questions relate to the final theme we can glean from the miniscule body of literature on community reactions to service learning—concerns about the unequal relationship between community and academy. Jones (2003) suggests that much service learning will be initiated by the institutions, but the burden of managing the service learning students will fall disproportionately on the community organizations that host them. In fact, there is some reason to suspect that poor communities may be serving the students more than

the students are serving the community (Sandy and Holland, 2006). The exception to this disparity in the balance of workload may be the community organizations that experience a more equal relationship with tribal, historically black, and Hispanic-serving colleges and universities (Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2000).

Beyond this superficial indication that there may be communication, cultural, and power issues in service learning relationships, however, we know little about how service learning affects communities. We especially don't know how service learning affects communities from the perspective of those who live and work there. That puts us in dangerous territory. By not knowing what service learning does to the communities it purports to serve, we risk creating unintended side effects that exacerbate, rather than alleviate, the problems those communities suffer from. Furthermore, as academics, we risk burning bridges rather than building them if the communities decide our students are doing more harm than good, or are more trouble than they are worth. We may be setting into motion dialectical processes that ultimately undermine the entire effort of service learning.

The Dialectic of Service Learning

Our willful ignorance of the community impact and perceptions of service learning are part of what we might consider a dialectical process. Viewing service learning as a dialectical organizational process means seeing it not as a simple linear cause-and-effect process, but as a feedback process where the combined effects, many of them unintended, can ultimately undermine the original program (Benson, 1977, 1983). To think dialectically, consider an organization attempting to improve women's access to mammography. They believe that poor women aren't getting mammograms because the nearest mammography center is too far away, so they bring a portable mammography truck into the neighborhood once a month during the day. A year later, they look at the statistics on who is using the portable option and find out that the number of women from the neighborhood who are getting mammograms has not increased. In desperation, they go out and ask women why they aren't getting mammograms and discover it is because the truck is there only during the day when the women are working. They

also learn that many women are quite irritated by the organizers' lack of sensitivity to their work schedules. Therefore, a program that was designed to both provide better medical service and build a better image of the medical profession is not affecting the former and is actually undermining the latter. A dialectical analysis then asks us to think about programmatic implementations as containing either latent or manifest contradictions that, left unresolved, can wreck the program itself.

To conduct a dialectical analysis, J. K. Benson (1977, 1983) directs us to look at the relationship between multiple programmatic goals, or between the goals and their implementation, which create outcomes that feed back into the program itself in potentially disruptive ways. People attempt to implement beliefs and principles in organizational settings, but they are never able to do so without constraint. Conditions that are not wholly compatible with the implementation are created by external funding and legal constraints and mandates, internal organizational structures and policies, and the informal power relations that exist within the organization and between the organization and its outside world. The lack of compatibility can subvert or divert the implementation in ways that participants neither intend nor recognize.

In service learning, the focus on student-learning goals, to the exclusion of any theoretical consideration of community development outcomes, has created a situation where we don't know what internal contradictions may be occurring. For example, we don't know the extent to which the development of service learning programs to primarily serve student and institutional interests may undermine community interests, which may negatively impact the community and undermine community support for the service learning program. If community input isn't solicited, it could come as a big surprise one day when faculty call "the usual suspects" in their community Rolodex, expecting to quickly and conveniently place a class of twenty students, and have the executive director just say, "No, thanks!" That has actually happened in many indigenous communities, as decades of exploitive research have led those communities to deny access to both researchers and students from higher education institutions (Smith, 1999). Randy Stoecker has a twenty-year history as a community-engaged academic, and has seen more bad than good service learning:

I have had so many scary experiences with service learning. The other day I was talking with a colleague who runs a service learning course. He encourages his students to think up projects and then go do them, arguing that it's not so important that the project succeed, but that the student learns something from it. I've heard other academics talk about the community as a "laboratory" where students try things. None of them reflect on the consequences for the community of failed projects, or faulty experiments. Indeed, none of them even develop a relationship with the communities in which their students are making their mistakes.

I must admit to some of this myself. The semester before this research project, I let my students search out their community projects. I always required a letter from the sponsoring agency at the beginning of the project agreeing to it, and one at the end stating that the student fulfilled their obligations. But I rarely had any relationship with the organization staff. This research has forced me to rethink all of that and to try some new things, in close collaboration with a community organization. Listening carefully to the organization staff, one thing I learned was how much time they put into supervising students. So we tried a model where one student would get trained as an intermediary and would supervise all the other service learning students. It didn't work perfectly, but it saved the organization about twenty hours in supervisory time and got some real work accomplished.

But the contradictions of the wrong way of producing civic engagement through higher education have become increasingly obvious as we have worked on this book. I've now encountered two students who have had their dissertations disrupted because the indigenous communities with which they were working decided that the benefits of the research were unfairly balanced in favor of the student and the institution. I have talked to a group of organizations in another small city who look with dread upon the annual spring ritual when the high schools empty and force all of their students to do community service that seems more like some kind of perverted

work-release program than anything that has any benefit for anyone. Groups around the nation and indeed the world are beginning to speak up and decry what they see as a poorly considered theory of civic engagement in education today.

The unheard community organization voices, our partners in non-profit organizations and even ad hoc neighborhood grassroots groups who host service learners, are crucial to helping us conduct this dialectical analysis. But we must listen to them first. This project set out to listen carefully to those partners. Their voices speak quite clearly about the dialectical processes, and resultant contradictions, that may be undermining what we are trying to achieve.

A Way of Listening to Unheard Voices

How did we set out to learn what the staff of community organizations think about service learning? The process evolved gradually. I (Randy Stoecker) arrived in Madison, Wisconsin, in 2005 with an undeserved reputation as a service learning supporter (since I'd been criticizing the practice for at least half a decade by that time). I was escorted around town by a tireless community advocate and academic staff member at the University of Wisconsin named Margaret Nellis, who had been trying for even longer to guide the university toward truly serving communities in Madison through service learning. As we drove from organization to organization that day, we started hearing stories of some of the problems that community groups were having with service learning students. As I later met with more and more community groups, as part of an informal listening project, the weariness of organization staff who exhausted themselves trying to find make-work for students every semester became palpable.

After hearing too many stories of frustration with service learning, we started considering the possibility of doing something systematic to address this issue. Consequently, in November 2005, we convened a meeting of directors and volunteer coordinators who represented a diverse array of about twenty organizations to talk about service learning. The organization staff who attended the meeting were not uniformly negative about service learning; indeed, they actually liked the concept, but they were frustrated by its implementation in their orga-

nizations. When we asked whether they would like to start a process of really looking seriously at their concerns to see if we could do something about them, they said yes. Seven participants from that focus group agreed to form a core group to guide the research process. Our first decision was to focus on small- to medium-sized nongovernmental organizations (defined roughly as those with less than a $1 million annual budget and/or twelve or fewer full-time staff). School systems, government departments, and large nonprofits have more resources to risk, whereas small- to medium-sized organizations cannot afford to waste them on service learning that is not useful. In some ways, they also have the most to gain, as a few highly effective service learners can have a profound effect on the organization's capacity. It is important to understand that, while many of these organizations were part of the community fabric and were led by the constituencies they served, many others were traditional nonprofit organizations led by outside staff and boards. Our research, consequently, represents the reactions of those who are responsible for recruiting, training, managing, and evaluating service learners, not necessarily those who were subject to the services and projects in which the students were involved.

The next step was to put together a process to find out what community organizations really thought about service learning. For that we needed capacity, so with support from the University of Wisconsin's Morgridge Center for Public Service, the Edgewood College Human Issues Studies Program, and the Madison Area Technical College Volunteer Center, we recruited students to a special seminar on qualitative research methods billed as a community-based research course. We got eleven students, three university-based AmeriCorps*VISTA members, and an Edgewood College community partner specialist in human issues to participate in the seminar. Beth Tryon, the Edgewood staff member who has been working for three years with community partners facilitating service learning projects, is the coeditor of this project. Amy Hilgendorf, one of the AmeriCorps*VISTA members, also assisted with the editing of this volume.

The research presented in this book was designed jointly by the core community group (mostly executive directors and volunteer coordinators from social service and advocacy organizations), members of the student seminar, and two faculty researchers. We first held a brainstorming session to design the questions that would elicit the best

information about their perceptions of service learning. Suggestions coming from the focus group were so fast and furious, we filled an entire wall of a large meeting room with notes on flip-chart paper! These ideas boiled down to a list of seven main questions. This group agreed to use a broad definition of service learning that included any student performing any service for credit. That included some students that may more accurately be considered interns or practicum students. We know there are many service learning purists who will object to this inclusion. The reality we discovered, however, is that there is very little service learning that conforms to narrow definitions and, from the community organization's perspective, hairsplitting academic definitions are so out of touch with the actual practice of service learning in community organizations that they are nearly irrelevant. In addition, adopting a broad definition allowed us to compare community organization staff reactions to different types of student placements. Here we actually found more variation in reaction between long-term and short-term service learning than we did between long-term service learning and placements such as internships, as we discuss in the chapter on short-term service learning.

We created a master list of small- and medium-sized nonprofit organizations that had worked with service learners from information obtained through the service learning offices at the three higher education institutions in Madison, and from other sources of the class members. We initially identified a population of 101 organizations that had worked with service learners from one or more institutions, though we have identified about twenty more organizations since this research. Madison is ripe with opportunity for study, as it claims the distinction of having the highest number of nonprofit organizations per capita in the United States, as well as a large number of activists and dedicated, interested community members. The organizations we contacted ranged from traditional social service groups to those dealing with worker's rights, women's advocacy, youth programs, and environmental issues. We divided up the list and made phone requests for a one-hour interview with the appropriate staff member at each organization. We targeted the staff member who had the most experience working with service learners, normally the executive director or volunteer coordinator, if they were fortunate enough to have one. Some organizations

declined, based on their belief that they had been erroneously identified as having service learners. Others either had recently lost or rehired the volunteer coordinator or other staff person who managed service learning, and didn't feel like they had the capacity to participate. Most of those who declined cited time constraints. A small number initially agreed to be interviewed but then did not keep their appointments. This is all to be expected given that we were approaching the most vulnerable nonprofit organizations in the city. Those that we weren't able to interview didn't seem to change the representativeness of the sample. The final interviewees still came from a very wide array of different types of organizations. We ended up interviewing sixty-seven staff from sixty-four organizations, with each seminar participant doing five or six interviews apiece. We returned the transcripts to the interviewees for validity checks.

None of us had ever experienced a qualitative research project with this many people working together at the same time—with the objective being a written report by the end of that semester. But since we didn't know it "couldn't be done"—we did it! We began the drafting process in class, sharing interview experiences and beginning to identify general themes from the data. A Web site developed specifically with our needs in mind provided a password-protected space to post our written transcripts and audio files. We then could download the partial interview transcripts from the site and review the texts, confirming and adding to the themes discussed in class. Everyone compared the themes to their interview experiences and suggested changes in the theme structure. For example, one student found that many of his interviewees discussed various roles that service learning played in an organization, such as providing extra hands to accomplish the organization's regular work, adding new "bonus" capacity, or simply helping prepare future nonprofit professionals. Another student distinguished these discussions as describing "self versus altruistic motives" or "organization versus student benefits" and believed that the organization's orientation greatly influenced its subsequent decision making about such things as accepting service learners and evaluating their work. Because of this discussion, we reframed a theme on service learning definitions to highlight organizations' motivations and goals for service learning as well.

Through the iterative in-class and online discussions, seven themes emerged:

1. Goals and motivations of community organizations for service learning
2. Finding and selecting service learners
3. Structuring service learning
4. Managing service learners and service learning projects
5. Diversity and service learning
6. Relationship and communication with the higher education institutions
7. Indicators of success

These themes corresponded with, but did not completely mirror, the original questions we had about community reactions to service learning. Students then broke into two- or three-person teams and each team coded all the interviews for their major theme and analyzed all the interviews to develop that theme and specify subthemes, following the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Each team took responsibility for crafting the findings from their theme into a chapter of the report. The grounded theory process and the openness of the interview protocol allowed issues to emerge that we had not been able to predict beforehand.

We made a conscious decision to include many of the richest quotes from the transcripts to illustrate the main points of each category, so that community organization reactions could be told as much as possible in the words of the community agency staff. We posted drafts of the report on a public Web site for community organization staff and anyone else who was interested to review and validate (Mays and Pope, 2000; Morse et al., 2002). The chapters you see in this collection are revisions of the original student team reports.

But we didn't want to stop with a report, so the end of the semester culminated in a "planning event" to which we invited all the agencies that had been contacted, even those that had been unable to participate in the interviews. Our class and about thirty community organizations gathered for approximately four hours in a large meeting room at the United Way building, with food, drink, and lots of markers and Post-it Notes. The event began with poster stations where each student

group presented the main points of their chapter and agency staff could circulate and ask questions. The organization attendees each received a dot sticker to place on the poster of their choice to indicate the category they were interested in discussing further later in the day.

Before we held those small-group discussions, we split the attendees arbitrarily into two halves to form "fishbowls," where they listened to live interviews of two agency staff who'd had what they considered "nearly ideal" service learning experiences. These formed the basis of some ideas for recommendations for better practice. We then sorted ourselves into the small-group discussions, and asked the agency representatives to help devise a list of recommendations based on the report that would strengthen relationships between academic institutions and community agencies. There was a certain amount of overlap of recommendations from the small groups and the discussions strongly reinforced the research findings.

This experience gave us assurance that we were on the right track. The main suggestion from several of the small groups at the planning event was to create some type of document outlining a list of "Community Standards for Service Learning." So we embarked on another series of focus-group conversations with some of the organizations we interviewed, and other interested nonprofits. This culminated in a brochure that detailed the community's standards for service learning, and we are now seeking endorsements for the standards from both the community and the academic side across greater Madison.

We have been presenting our findings to everyone who would listen—at any gathering we can find of any combination of community organizations, faculty, students, and service learning professionals. We weren't sure how these community recommendations would be received by folks from the academic side. Would higher education administrators be defensive? Would faculty scoff at the suggestions, saying that there's no way they could follow them with all the other demands on their time? Would service learning professionals resist the implications for the structure of their programs? We found a surprising amount of support for these recommendations on the community side. As well, people on the academic side of the equation are excited and grateful to have this information, as they would like to improve their service learning practice. They approach us with the brochure clutched in their hands, thanking us for creating two succinct

pages of basic principles, at which point we must confess it was our community organization partners who limited us to one sheet of paper.

We don't know where else this might take us next, but if we have helped even a few nonprofit agencies to feel more empowered in their work with service learning students, faculty, and administration, then the time has been well spent.

The Findings

Our primary objective in the initial research was a simple, comprehensible report for the community organizations to learn of our findings and from which they could craft an action project. However, after reading the drafts, we began to think that we had something pretty unique and important that might deserve a wider reading audience. We, and many of the organization staff we spoke with, wanted to tell the world what we found. What we learned about the insights of community organization staff concerning the current state of service learning was eye-opening, and we are convinced it will enlighten others as well.

Our research goes far beyond the paucity of current research on community reactions to service learning to take a much deeper look at how community organizations define, perceive, and evaluate service learning. In doing so, we diverge slightly from the seven themes that emerged from the research process. Organization representatives raised many provocative issues related to communication and relationship building, training and management of service learners, and cultural competency. But perhaps the most consistent theme that emerged was the frequent reference to challenges associated with short-term service learning. This was something we hadn't really been expecting and it was therefore all the more surprising, since this type of service learning is so prevalent. The complaints about it were so frequent that we have revised the structure of the original report to devote an entire chapter to the problem of short-term service learning.

The following chapters discuss the challenges, pitfalls, and praise of service learning from the viewpoint of the community. Those of you who have poured your hearts and souls into service learning may find this book a bit painful to read. The community organizations we spoke

with have some strong critiques of service learning practices that have become all too typical in the new millennium. Some readers may reject our focus on the problems. In many cases, the problems we describe in this volume are often voiced by a minority of organizations, and it would be easy for someone to say that because only a sixth, or a third, of the organizations identify a problem that it's not a problem. Of course, in our country, it is always the minority that has been ignored. Often, that minority also represents the proverbial tip of the iceberg. Since we did not know what we would find, we did not have a checklist of specific problems. But we have spoken to organizations who have read our results and have said "me too," even when they didn't tell us that concern during the initial interview. Furthermore, a problem can be considered widespread if it is experienced by only a tenth of the organizations.

By the same token, every time we could gather enough positive information on a subject to consider it a subtheme, we included it. Our hope was to show things that *are* working for the community organizations so that those practices might be incorporated into future service learning project planning. The final chapter on indicators of success reinforces the emphasis of this book on improving, not undermining, service learning. Indeed, our conclusion, following a dialectical analysis, is that the greatest threat to the sustainability of service learning is to continue our current common practice.

We also want the reader to know that our collection of voices is incomplete. Because our focus was on the staff of community organizations who managed service learners, you only indirectly hear voices of community constituency members who receive services from service learners. This is consistent with the other research out there, and has the same shortcomings. Because we did not talk with community members impacted (or not) by service learning, one could argue that we do not know if the concerns expressed by community organization staff matter. Such a dismissal, however, would be shortsighted. Many of the negative impacts of the dominant model of service learning described by community organization staff are obvious to all who would listen. It is not the case that we can't judge the negative impacts of service learning from the voices of community organization staff, but only that we can't judge the extent of the negative impacts. At this point in the path of research on service learning, organization staff are the first

stop. Such research defines the questions and issues that we can explore with more depth at the grassroots level. It can, in fact, be part of a conscientization process with community members to support their critical analysis of service learning as a next step toward removing the higher education dominance of the practice.

Beyond the goal of improving service learning, we feel a responsibility to promote the voices of our community partners, since they have long been marginalized in the service learning frenzy. With their lack of power over the institutions they deal with, and their need to be receptive to college-student volunteer help, it seems crucial to continue to work toward making service learning a smoother experience for them, and in that way to be doing some good in the community. When service learning is done right, with proper input from the agencies that are being served, it can be a most useful tool both for filling urgent needs in society and still fulfilling learning objectives, maybe in an even deeper way. Our hope is that our research may contribute to the dialogue between campus and community so that improvements are made in a timely enough fashion to mitigate some of the challenges straining the capacities of the nonprofit organizations that are gracious enough to allow learners into their daily work.

But now let us listen to the unheard voices of the community organization staff who host service learners.