

## **Implementing and sustaining higher education service-learning initiatives: Revisiting Young et al's organisational tactics**

**Keywords:** service learning; Indigenous; higher education; arts; organisational tactics

Australian higher education institutions are undergoing a period of change and scrutiny in response to growing opportunities to institute Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture at every level of activity. Several national and international frameworks and reports have contributed to this current period of development, including the 2008 Review of Australian Higher Education (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008) and the National Indigenous Higher Education Network's 2009 report to the United Nations (NIHEN, 2009). In line with service learning, Stella and Baird (2008, p. 3) note that "the move towards 'Indigenising' Australian higher education has been a more general movement toward the "community engaged university". They continue:

In Australian universities and colleges "community engagement" is typically treated very broadly, encompassing all forms of interaction between universities and their various external communities, including engagement with regional partners, industry, government, alumni, Indigenous communities, community organisations, and other education sectors. (Stella & Baird, 2008, p. 3)

Until relatively recently, Australian higher education policy, reform and institutions have focussed on economic development in lieu of the broader conceptions of civic, cultural, and social advancement that characterised the United States (US) and European higher education systems (Winter et al., 2006). As such, the bulk of "engagement" activities in Australian higher education institutions have been targeted toward industry rather than the not-for-profit and community sectors (Winter et al., 2006). In keeping with the push toward broader social responsibility in higher education institutions at the time (see Garlick, 2000; Brown & Muirhead, 2001; [hidden], 2004), the 2002 *Higher Education at the Crossroads* discussion paper offered a broader agenda for Australian higher education, indicating that:

Higher education institutions need to be responsive to the social, economic and cultural needs of the communities in which they are located and foster a more active engagement with these communities ... Engagement needs to become an integral part of what the regional university does, not an adjunct to its existing functions. It should be part of the core business, seen as being academically relevant and recognised as an important contribution to the overall role of the university ... Engagement is a two way process. Both parties need to agree on mutual objectives, which may include job generation, business and investment growth and increased participation. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002, p. 32)

The current paper responds to broader shifts in Australian higher education including Universities Australia's *National Best Practice Framework for Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities* (2012). The Framework represents perhaps the strongest move toward embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in Australian higher education, "in sustainable ways which engender reconciliation and social justice by enabling the factors that contribute to social, economic and political change" (p. 8). These shifts strengthen calls to better understand the implementation and sustainability of community service-learning initiatives, including those that seek to work with Australia's first peoples.

## Service learning in higher education

Service learning has developed as a pedagogical approach in higher education internationally for several decades, led primarily by academics located at teaching-focussed universities and colleges in the United States (see Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Butin, 2003; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Furco, 2001; Morton & Troppe, 1996). Service learning's theoretical and practical foundations stem from experiential education and constructivism, which frame service learning as opportunities for students to apply knowledge they have learned in the classroom within community contexts (Furco, 2001) both for community engagement and because of the educational benefits of experiential learning (Higgins, 2009).

A significant portion of the literature on implementing service learning in higher education focuses on "institutionalising" service learning within higher education institutions. Chrisman (2007) has argued that the most intense formulations of institutionalisation involve a change in organisational culture in order to promote service and engagement as a core aspect of the curriculum and all organisational activities. Given that implementing community service learning in higher education requires significant institutional support and transformation (see Butin, 2003; Furco, 2001; Holland, 1997; Young et al., 2007), institution-wide support and transformation is a logical feature; such transformations range across

- Subject and course design, student assessment, and evaluation (Fletcher & Cambre, 2009; Polin & Keene, 2010);
- Institutional culture change (Cleary & Brown, 1998; Holland, 1997; Shrader et al., 2008);
- Staff training, reward structures and incentives that acknowledge service learning and community engagement as key areas of staff performance (Bender, 2007); and
- Creating a dedicated office and support staff for service learning within the administration (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Young et al., 2007).

It is likely, however, that many service-learning initiatives begin with few, if any of these "requirements".

Institutionalising service learning is also viewed as a strategy for ensuring sustainability. Sustainable service-learning initiatives are often defined by the duration of activities between a university or college and one or more partners (Schramm, 2007). Some authors emphasise that service-learning initiatives should be financially "self-sustaining" through activities such as fundraising or product sales. Similarly, financial sustainability can ensure a regular flow of student involvement over time.

Regardless of scale, longevity, or initial institutional support, sustainability is a critical issue for service-learning coordinators because discontinued programs are known to elicit disappointment from all participants (Cashman et al., 2004). Such are the difficulties of discontinued initiatives that Doyle et al. (2004) have questioned whether projects that cannot be maintained for long periods of time should be started at all. This highlights the need to understand how each initiative might be positioned to maximise its potential for sustainability. A number of researchers (Butin, 2003, Doyle et al., 2004, Schramm, 2007 and Vogel et al., 2010) have addressed this question and contend that sustainability can be achieved through:

- Long-term commitment to community partnerships and trust building;
- Staff development and training;
- Reduced duplication of effort;
- Incentives and recognition;
- Centralised services that relieve individual staff members of time-consuming tasks associated with service learning; and

- Sharing the benefits and influence of each initiative between stakeholders and partners, including sustainable and desirable outcomes from the community perspective.

Against this background we report our own work, which included our collaboration in a study that positioned arts-based service learning (ABSL) as a strategy through which Australian universities and colleges might promote Indigenous cultural content for students, staff, and the broader community. In this paper we examine our experiences in relation to Young et al's (2007) four tactics for implementing and sustaining service learning at the institutional level, and present an argument for the addition of a fifth tactic: that of institutional commitment.

## **Approach and theoretical framework**

The research reported here stemmed from funded, arts-based service learning in which university creative arts students and education pre-service teachers worked with Aboriginal communities in urban and rural areas of Australia. The project involved parallel studies at three large urban universities, one in Western Australia, one in New South Wales and one in Queensland. Typical of service-learning initiatives in Australia, all three initiatives were small and targeted, involving a total of 70 arts majors and 37 pre-service teachers, more than 140 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and Elders Indigenous artists and Elders, and over 150 youth. The respective research offices at all three universities approved the research protocols and instruments. In addition, participants were assured that their anonymity would be respected and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice or negative consequences.

The research adopted an action research approach such that all participants were co-researchers (Mobley, 2011). It combined a range of conceptual-theoretical resources with the voices and experiences of the students, academic researchers and community members. Participant experiences were drawn from digital stories, diaries and interviews, guided critical reflections, and showcase events in which the experiences were shared with all stakeholders.

As part of the critical reflection process, we, the educator-researchers, responded to three sets of reflective questions posed at the start, middle and end of the collaboration, and we kept reflective journals. In these reflections we considered our collaborative work and also our independent service-learning experiences within multiple projects over a period of between three and 17 years.

Central to the development of the research instrument was the US study of twelve universities conducted by Young et al. (2007, p. 353-4), who identified four main tactics for implementing and sustaining service learning initiatives:

1. A faculty or administrative champion/zealot;
2. A groundswell of interest from various parties (faculty, administrators, students, and community agencies);
3. A grant opportunity... (usually combined with a zealot); or
4. A group of student zealots.

The work of Young et al (2007) incorporated all four of the constituencies previously identified by Bringle and Hatcher (1996): namely the institution, faculty, students and community. Whilst we amassed research data from all four constituencies, for this paper we focus on the critical reflections of the educator-researchers. As such, and following Young et al's advice (2007, p. 364) that future research should "tease apart" differences in relation to tactics and strategies, the team members commented on the presence or otherwise of Young's four tactics, reflected on our individual fears, hopes and experiences, and considered the

involvement of Bringle and Hatcher's four constituencies. The basic reflective questions are recorded at Appendix A. These were extended as required to explore emergent themes.

Team members were given two weeks in which to complete each set of critical reflection questions. Analysis was inductive in nature and involved multiple readings to fully explore and analyze the data. This approach is similar to that taken by other qualitative researchers (Pratt et al., 2006; Kreiner et al., 2009). Our methods were also consistent with recommendations to establish the credibility of findings: we drew extensive quotes from the data; we used multiple investigators to analyze data and to compare and refine this process; and we confirmed coding categories, interpretations and conclusions with co-participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The "naturalistic" coding process started with readings of each reflection without codes being applied. Categories were then developed using a constant comparative analytical scheme that involved unitizing and categorizing the text. These were subsequently brought together into provisional categories relating to common content and were then aligned with the tactics defined by Young et al. (2007). A further reading allowed for the emergence of new themes and categories and some thematic reduction. The process then required each team member to respond to requests for further comment, clarification, or to validate intended meaning. This led to the final codebook from which the themes in this paper were drawn. Finally, the data were displayed in a way that is conceptually pure, making distinctions that are meaningful and which provide interesting content. We note that some themes were expected based on Young's previous study, whilst others had not been anticipated.

## **Results and discussion**

The themes that emerged from our research included all four of the tactics identified by Young et al (2007); however, in this study we were able to explore both the presence of themes and the ways in which they were experienced. We also identified a fifth tactic, titled *Institutional Commitment*. Commitment is often thought of as an existing enabler; however, in this study it was a tactic employed by service-learning champions to prompt *new* organisational commitment, to enact *existing* organisational commitment that had been made at the policy level, and to extend *limited* organisational commitment by gaining academic legitimacy and recognition for their work and the work of others.

In this section we present and discuss all five tactics presented at Table 1, incorporating the voices of participants as we reflected on previous and current service-learning work.

Table 1: Tactics as defined by Young et al (2007) and as defined in this study

(Please place Table 1 near here)

### ***The tactics***

#### *Tactic 1: A champion or zealot in the faculty or institution*

Young et al's (2007) first tactic, *a champion or zealot in the faculty or institution*, dominated the responses. In line with their findings, and as suggested earlier by Holland (1997), one key person often became a vehicle "for disseminating commitment to service across the institution" (Holland, 1997, p. 39, in Young et al, 2007). In our research the champions took one of three forms: those of the authority champion; the active champion; and

the community champion. The first is someone in authority, who lends “support for the viability and effectiveness” (Young et al., p. 361) of service-learning initiatives: for example,

Our director met musicians from the community and they dreamt up the possibility of sending a group of students ... he knew I was crazy enough to be interested in this.

The Head of Program was very supportive of this initiative. We wrote the unit into the set of 12 units as we planned the program.

The first quote above signals that the ‘authority champion’ often presents and supports an opportunity and then ‘hands over’ to an ‘active champion’. The same participant later reflected on this, noting:

The director approached me to make it happen. I did everything. ... Now that I think back, it was a VERY big job to get this off the ground.

By far the most common form of institutionally based champions appears to be the active champions, who tend to push service learning from the bottom up and remain actively engaged across multiple projects and over multiple years. One of the fundamental considerations for the active champions, all of whom in this case work with Australia’s first peoples, was the need to establish and maintain relationships of trust with communities (Mackinlay, 2008). This is where the community champions arise, not merely as community members who are supportive of the work, but as drivers, enablers and co-contributors of service-learning initiatives. Although this paper focuses on the perspectives of the educator-researchers, the reciprocal nature of these initiatives is clear in the following comments from community members, who express their expectations, authority and hopes for the partnerships:

It's going to be a long sustainable thing ... and giving those skills coming across, it's just a huge partnership. ... They've all become a part of the [community].

When I began negotiating for a tight team of high resilience and genuine commitment to cross-cultural interaction, I never expected to actually get the “A-team” ... the ripple effect of your engagement out here is huge and, I mean this, forever.

Students are “expected to develop and support cultural activities, and raise the profile of cultural activities in community, in the smaller communities as well as the wider, basically international community.

What else do I hope they're learning? A little bit of the culture hopefully as well. Hopefully learning more about the people. How it runs out here and then being able to give that - take that back to the university: spread it through word to everyone else and keep building it.

As we have argued previously (hidden), these reciprocal relationships of trust are central to the development of successful service learning partnerships between universities and First Peoples:

This refers not only to the interpersonal relationships developed between students and members of local communities in the field, but also to the on-going relationships between university personnel and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that collaborate in service learning programs. Community trust of institutions and institutional understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community strengths and needs are

important aspects of service learning partnerships that develop over time in the course of multiple repeated opportunities for interpersonal interaction.

The involvement of students is often on a short-term basis, and this means that the carriage of these relationships falls to individual active champions. This emerged clearly in the responses:

to maintain a continuity of relationship with our Indigenous colleagues, each year the program is facilitated by the same two people.

When they see us coming back, year after year, a little older, I'd like to think that shows we're in it for the long haul.

Given that active champions often carry the responsibility for service-learning initiatives, it is unsurprising that they described doing what Young et al (2007, p. 362) include as program director roles: "to ensure the viability, longevity, and institutionalisation of service-learning at their institutions". Indeed, active champions are often the creators (or inheritors), drivers, and coordinators of service learning, even in cases where other more generalised university support existed:

[Jane] began with an open invitation and continued to drive the project forward as ideas evolved and interested staff committed.

I guess I was the champion or zealot!

Now I have seen the impact on student development, both in terms of skills acquisition and personal growth, I ... will fight to have it included at my university and I have already started.

Active champions appear to often work alone or to lead small teams, and both within and outside of formal funding arrangements they appear to take on increased workloads in order to ensure the success of their service-learning initiatives. This was reflected in the comments:

It is a lot of work but it is deeply rewarding to see the impact on the students.

I hate to think how many hours went into the project, but it was worth it. None of us will ever forget the experience.

The time and energy we have poured into this project aren't worth thinking about ... but I would do it in a heartbeat if I had to start from scratch again.

#### *Tactic 2: A groundswell from interested parties*

The tactic of *Groundswell* was present in each of the projects described by participants and it emerged from a number of what Young et al (2007) describe as "interested parties". Principal among these were individual active champions: for example, "an important factor is Trudy and her energies in bringing everyone together". Acknowledging the role of community champions, participants also noted that groundswell can be initiated both within and outside the institution:

While there are strands that the university has brokered, there are also strands that have grown from schools contacting the university and asking for support ... because they had

heard about the award [for service-learning work] and the varied service learning in which pre-service teachers were engaged.

As seen in the previous quote, the number of interested parties often grew as previous service-learning projects became more widely known. One participant recounted that “from small beginnings ... our partners grew in number” as primary and secondary schools began to ask whether pre-service teachers might “provide mentors, help students at risk, and help with the transition to high school or the workforce”. The same participant noted that at the start of that particular project, nine years earlier, “not many people knew what this might develop into. It has since become a significant element in the program”.

Rather than being the trigger for service-learning initiatives, groundswell was reported as something that emerged over time and which demands both proactive and reactive actions throughout and beyond the lifespan of individual projects:

The hardest part was getting the word out to colleagues. ... There were several false starts, often with colleagues who were interested but simply didn't have the time and energy to follow through.

Some colleagues have come along to one of our sessions, particularly when there was cultural awareness training. This has been good to see.

We are constantly building relationships with our communities.

After 6 years we have built in peer mentoring. ... This is also important for staff members.

I have now begun to meet with senior leaders to tell them about the project. Our articles and conference presentations are starting to engage the academic community more broadly.

Finally, participants noted that groundswell might be both hidden and disparate, suggesting that multiple initial contacts may be required in order to prompt it:

The final team was the result of a chance meeting, a referral, and a targeted approach to a known expert.

After I began, other champions were identified. I realise now that these people are often hidden – they're often not very “noisy” about their passions and interests.

### *Tactic 3: A grant opportunity*

In environments such as Australia, where many service-learning initiatives are on a relatively small scale, Tactic 3, *A grant opportunity*, is better described as ‘Funding’: indeed, Young et al (2007) acknowledge that even in the US most of their case studies relied initially on internal seed funding or a combination of soft and hard funding. In our case the coordinators had all taken advantage of grant opportunities and acknowledged their importance: “The OLT [Office for Learning and Teaching] grant is entirely responsible for this project – it would simply not exist without the grant”. However, few of the service-learning initiatives *arose* as the result of a grant opportunity; rather, active champions created opportunities by presenting a case to someone with the means to support it.

Funding also related to enhanced profile due to previous work or, in one case, recognition in the form of an award: “We won an award in 2010 ... This provided a high profile for service-learning”. For one academic, diverting surplus funding from a previous project enabled a new, unfunded project to go ahead: “[We] had a small amount of funding available from a prior project with Indigenous musicians”. Other academics had benefitted from

financial relief in the form of an additional workload allowance or help with an event. One academic attributed the existence of a recent initiative to a particular person, her authority champion, who was “a sympathetic head of department!”

Given Young et al’s (2007, p. 362) acknowledgement that “while grant money can assist in starting up a service-learning program, it is *not* a viable means for keeping it running”, we recommend renaming the tactic “funding”, which enables the inclusion of both soft and hard money as well as seed funding in forms such as workload allowances.

#### *Tactic 4: Student zealots or champions*

We accept that student buy-in is a challenge for many service-learning initiatives, particularly those seeking to engage online students (Waldner et al., 2012). In this study only one participant ran service-learning initiatives that were compulsory for students, and in her case students were keen to be involved. Student champions were identified as students who are keen to learn about and engage with Australia’s first peoples. Students were

Aware of how little they know about Aboriginal people and culture.

Quick to respond ... they participated because they had an interest and/or a passion to find out more about Indigenous culture and ways of knowing.

Eager to know more about Indigenous people and culture.

Students, however, were described as receivers rather than initiators, although we acknowledge the role that students play in fostering awareness by talking informally with their peers. The broader interests of students and the type of students attracted to such programs were also acknowledged:

Students have an appetite for learning experiences that take them outside of the classroom ... to have an impact in their own communities.

Students are aware of social justice issues and welcome opportunities to make a difference.

Disinterested students would not have enabled the project the way these students did.

#### *Tactic 5: Institutional commitment*

Young et al (2007, p. 347) have argued that the institutionalisation of service learning often occurs where there is a concurrently “high level of institutional commitment to service-learning”. We would concur; in our experience, the level of commitment and the activity resulting from that commitment at the policy level were far less certain, and none were institutionalised. In this research, existing institutional commitment enabled active champions to find like-minded peers, join or create a new groundswell of interest, present their ideas to people in authority, and celebrate their successes:

Institutional commitment was high to start with and it remains high: “this project is seen to be one of the few genuine projects to connect with our Indigenous people as an institution.

There is a culture of support for Indigenous projects ... There are staff at all levels of the university who are actively working to progress the university’s RAP plan [reconciliation action plan] and who are eager to engage with and support Indigenous projects such as this.

*Institutional commitment* emerged as a fifth and distinct tactic of equal importance to those identified by Young et al (2007). The prevalence of this tactic may relate to the relatively



small nature of many service-learning initiatives in Australia, and to the fact that few initiatives are institution-wide or program-wide; however, institutional commitment also arose as a significant challenge, even for participants whose institutions gave the appearance of commitment:

When we started ... there was lots of interest and a RAP plan [reconciliation action plan], but little action and no processes.

The challenge was most often felt in relation to two key themes: structure and processes; and funding. The response to these challenges is of particular interest because in almost all cases it required individual active champions to overcome them. A common course of action was to pioneer new ways of working. Initially this often involved working “creatively” with or despite existing protocols, and/or working “under the radar”, as can be seen in the following quote:

At the School level it [institutional commitment] was excellent. At the Faculty level I anticipated it to be more difficult and so set up the project in an informal way that did not require me to work at a Faculty level. ... Ideally the project should run as a service-learning unit with its own official learning outcomes etc.

The problem with program design was that there are few if any generic units to which we could adapt the project. For students with a double major there are no electives. It's crazy, because graduate work in the arts will inevitably mean working in interdisciplinary teams, and there's simply no way to build this experience into our teaching. [As a result] our work wasn't framed as service learning as there was no structure for it. ... the most suitable place for the project was in the work-integrated-learning program ... an internship-style elective! Honestly, it was a huge amount of work and we didn't have many students at first. Without continuing support from the Faculty for workload, and without a home in which to place the projects, I don't know that we can continue. We'll try of course!

Another academic described institutional ethics processes that were not sufficiently nuanced to accommodate their work with Australian first peoples, despite the institution's reputation for being a leader in Indigenous service learning. As a result, she had to pioneer new ethical processes:

... this work requires a constant negotiation with community members regarding ethics, and this goes beyond what is simply required by our ethics office. It requires constant negotiation on an interpersonal level and a constant attentiveness to cultural protocols, e.g. the use of materials and photographs collected and how these can be used in reporting after the death of a community member, etc.

A third academic described the challenges of quietly “leveraging” her service-learning initiative into a unit designed for individual creative research projects:

Formal university support would be good. At this point I don't want to shout too loudly about the project – we have ethics and so on, but there's always the risk that we missed some rule or policy! ... It took nine months to find a home for the project. In the end we “acquired” part of a special projects unit in which most students could enrol. Other students received special supervision from teaching staff inside other units not designed for this project. And there were others who wanted to participate but were unable to fit this unit into their course structure. For some of our students, participation meant attending two sets of classes with a modified assessment agreed for their “official” unit. This was far from ideal and meant a lot of extra work for the students and lecturers.

We didn't ask about the sustainability of service-learning initiatives *per se*, but sustainability emerged as a theme nonetheless. Of interest, financial and structural challenges co-existed with strong institutional commitment and authority champions, suggesting discrepancy between commitment and intent, and the ability of processes and structures to support them:

Despite “very high institutional commitment”, I am very concerned about funding next year's project when the current funding dries up.

If money was no issue, and we had endless time in our jobs and endless energy to continually manage all the complex dynamics and relationships involved, it would be very sustainable ... Those issues aside, I think this is the most feasible and sustainable way of integrating Indigenous perspectives and wisdom into our curriculum and the lives and future careers of our students.

There needs to be funding for such courses so that students do not make demands on the limited resources of many not-for-profit community organisations.

The university workload system does not adequately recognise the hours that go into a project such as this: establishing relationships with community partners and with students takes time.

Returning to Young et al's study on tactics for the implementation and sustainability of service-learning initiatives, the themes of start-up, funding, faculty and student involvement, assessment, and academic literacy were all present in our study. Moreover, the tactics that addressed these themes were employed throughout the lifespan of a project.

### **Recognising the fluidity of service learning**

Young et al (2007), as other researchers before and since, have maintained that in order to achieve academic legitimacy, service learning must be delivered as academic programs rather than “student affairs activities that are peripheral to the academic pursuits of the students” (Cleary & Benson, 2004, p. 124). Only one of our service-learning initiatives was embedded within a program, and it is no coincidence that this academic, who described her initiative as “a significant element in the program”, was the only person to report an initiative as “entirely sustainable”. Asked to comment, she explained that her initiative formed 25% of the program and was sustainable because of this. Moreover, it was valued as a unique and marketable component of the program:

Far from being questioned, the School executive talks of this unit as a distinguishing feature of the degree. In the newly designed course, the service-learning unit has remained an embedded unit. I would encourage other academics to achieve this.

Back in 2001, Lounsbury & Pollack (p. 320) maintained that community service learning occupied a “legitimate, though subordinate” place in higher education alongside other externally and internally controlled logics and imperatives. With the growth and refinement of service learning over the intervening years, it is time to argue afresh for service learning to gain legitimacy at an institutional level. Indeed, the academic legitimacy associated with the initiative described above lends further strength to the argument that these initiatives should be institutionalised; but what does that mean in practice?

Consonant with others (see Blouin & Perry, 2009; Butin, 2003; Furco, 2001; Nduna, 2007), Bender (2007) has argued for a broader perspective on institutionalising community

service learning (CSL) that takes into account an institution's environment and communities. This 'socio-systemic' approach to institutional change incorporates change at the external, internal and personal levels. Bender (2007, p. 129) has observed that external educational change is "mandated in a top-down manner" as in higher education policies and national initiatives, whilst change within higher education institutions initiates and promotes change "within the framework of strategies, support and enabling mechanisms for curricular community engagement". Personal change refers to the ways in which individual stakeholders view and practice community service learning "as an educational approach and philosophy".

Across all these domains, Bender (p. 138) has emphasised that institutionalised change must be supported by strong and dynamic relationships with communities:

The institutionalisation of CSL depends on an accepted internal and personal mission, characterised by passion, purpose, investment and ownership. Change should be embedded in new institutionalised practices and in the wider community. To change education is to change academics' work and their relationship with communities.

We agree with her on this point, but our research and the earlier research of Young et al suggests that external educational change may be driven from within and from the bottom up: for example, by refining processes such as ethics, or by driving the formation of new units of study. Similarly, internal change can be prompted by a groundswell of interest from external stakeholders including community champions and higher education policy makers. Shrader et al. (2008) have long argued for community-based networks for engagement and research that could facilitate and inform institutional activities in service learning and research. The experience of this study is that these networks exist, and that they (often quietly) drive bottom-up institutional change that influences institution-wide planning and institution-wide goal setting, such as that heralded two decades ago by Holland (1997) and Bringle & Hatcher (1996).

At Figure 1 we present a model that illustrates the fluidity of interactions, tactics and triggers between external, internal and individual stakeholders. We hope that greater recognition of this fluidity may help foster academic legitimacy and the institutionalisation of service learning without initiatives losing their specificity and their reciprocal relationships of trust. It may also highlight and reduce the reliance on individual goodwill, which currently emerges as an essential attribute of any active service-learning champion.

Figure 1: The fluidity of service-learning interactions, tactics and triggers

(please insert Figure 1 near here)

### **Limitations and recommendations for future research**

This paper presented the perspectives of five academics who reflected on their collaborative work and their previous experiences over multiple projects and up to 17 years. Young et al's (2007) four tactics of engagement provided an analytical frame, and the research found that a fifth tactic, that of *institutional commitment*, needs to be added. It also concluded that the other tactics might be reworded to reflect the myriad ways in which they are employed. Finally, the study revealed a fluidity of interactions, triggers and tactics that featured both at start-up and throughout the delivery of service-learning initiatives. This suggests that successful institutionalisation requires change at the external, internal and

personal levels as well as authority and active champions who drive change from both the top-down and the bottom-up.

A limitation of this research is that it involved a small convenience sample, albeit a sample of service-learning educator researchers with vast experience. Despite this, the research has begun to elucidate the operationalization of Young at al's (2007) four tactics and to consider the fluidity of tactics, themes and domains. Future research might expand on this with further cases in different contexts. It might also investigate the extent to which these features emerge in service-learning initiatives that are institutionalised, and whether this differs over time. Future research might also explore the extent to which service learning relies on "gift" labour (Hyde, 1983) and self-exploitation, perhaps calculating the value of service learning in terms of emotional, physical and real time costs.

Finally, we acknowledge that service-learning research commonly reports community perspectives on service-learning projects far less than the student or institutional perspectives (Boyle-Baise et al., 2001; Butin, 2003). As such, the bulk of discussions of sustainability in the service-learning literature focus on a university-centric view of sustaining service learning where communities are regarded as external "stakeholders" or "partners". We note the difficulty of engaging community participants in developing research-based resources for understanding and evaluating service learning. Whilst we have focused this paper on the perspectives of academic researchers engaged with service learning, we have gathered evidence in partnership with our community collaborators and hope to address this challenge in our future work. We anticipate that a more complete understanding of community perspectives might suggest a sixth tactic of community commitment and look forward to exploring this dimension.

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## Appendix A: Reflective questions on project development and implementation

What steps or phases did you go through to establish SL initiatives at your institution (or previous institution)? *Please consider issues such as where the ideas came from, support and/or opposition, and the length of time between having the ideas and starting the projects. Please reflect on both the current project and, where relevant, on your broader experience with service learning.*

- 1 Following Young's study (2007), did any of the 4 'main tactics' exist when you began? If so, please describe them and identify what influence they had:
  - a. A champion or zealot in the faculty or institution.
  - b. A groundswell from interested parties (institutional or community);
  - c. A grant opportunity;
  - d. Student zealots or champions;
  - e. None of the above
  - f. Other. (Please specify)
  
- 2 Please comment on your experience in accommodating the following, noting whether there were difficulties and/or support mechanisms, and how these were managed:
  - a. A 'home' for the initiative within the institution;
  - b. Program design;
  - c. Course/unit design;
  - d. Assessment;
  - e. The engagement of peers;
  - f. Institutional policies such as the regulations guiding fieldwork;
  - g. Research policies such as research involving students.
  
- 3 Implementation of SL initiatives requires significant institutional support and transformation. How would you rate institutional commitment when you started?
  - a. How many years ago was that?
  - b. How would you rate it now, and why?
  
- 4 What steps or phases did you go through to develop this project with community members?
  
- 5 How feasible and sustainable is this kind of teaching and learning?
  
- 6 Finally, what has the establishment of a SL initiative meant to you personally, both in terms of its benefits and its costs?
  
- 7 Would you like to share any other comments on establishing a service learning initiative?