Decoding Ourselves: An Inquiry into Faculty Learning About Reciprocity in Service-Learning

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Faculty learning about service-learning is an important area of research because understanding how faculty develop their practice is an important first step in improving student learning outcomes and relationships with community members. Enacting reciprocity in service-learning can be particularly troublesome because it requires faculty to learn to develop courses and partnerships in counternormative ways. This article reports on an approach to investigating and generating faculty learning – in our case about the threshold concept of reciprocity – through a group self-study process that included a new-to-the-field interview method developed for Decoding the Disciplines (Pace & Middendorf, 2004) followed by individual and then group reflection. Our self-study resulted in new perspectives and new awareness related to the value of examining the concept of reciprocity and the role of group dialogue in generating learning – although the specific nature of these changes was somewhat different for each of us – and analysis shows that that the Decoding interview and the multidisciplinary nature of our group were important in developing the trust necessary for this study to generate learning. We suggest that further collaborative inquiry within and across different service-learning and community engagement contexts could yield new insights about the value of using and integrating methods from self-study and ethnography for faculty professional development and research on faculty learning and could advance our collective understanding of the dynamics of co-learning and co-generation of knowledge within but also transcending SLCE.

Faculty[1] involvement with service-learning and community engagement (SLCE) is often motivated by a desire to participate in and learn from community partnerships (Colbeck & Janke, 2006; Janke, 2009; O'Meara, 2013). However, doing so requires faculty to learn to develop courses and partnerships in counternormative ways (Clayton & Ash, 2004; Howard, 1998). As Clayton, Hess, Jaeger, Jameson, and McGuire (2013) point out, "service learning pedagogy requires and fosters learning – often transformational, paradigm-shifting learning – on the part of everyone involved, including faculty" (p. 245). Chism, Palmer, and Price (2013) suggest that we need to better understand how faculty learn about and through service-learning (SL) and how to support them in their learning. While some studies have focused on the content and process of faculty learning in SL (see Clayton et al., 2013 for an overview), few have focused on the potential of co-learning through multidisciplinary faculty learning communities (for examples, see Lattuca & Creamer, 2005; McGuire, Strong, Lay, Ardemagni, Wittberg, & Clayton, 2009). Faculty studying their own learning

has much potential for advancing research and practice in SLCE, and the question of how faculty might conceptualize, generate, and investigate their own learning requires further exploration.

This article presents a self-study approach to inquiry into faculty learning in SLCE. The study was undertaken by seven faculty members from diverse disciplines at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Canada, in collaboration with two "critical friends" (Russell, 2009) who have experience conducting and supporting the scholarship of teaching and learning within and beyond SLCE. Each of the seven of us leads global service-learning (GSL) courses and has a particular interest in the concept of reciprocity, including how it manifests in both domestic and international partnerships. The study focuses on our learning about reciprocity in large part because of the difficulties we have experienced internalizing it, practicing it authentically, and helping students understand its complexities. Further, Harrison, Clayton, and Tilley-Lubbs (2014) propose that reciprocity may be a threshold concept for faculty learning about the pedagogy of SL and call for "ongoing

inquiry … into the processes by which such concepts are learned" (p. 13). Previous work done at Mount Royal University on threshold concepts and other ways of understanding the challenges associated with learning difficult concepts (e.g., Boman, Currie, MacDonald, Miller-Young, Yeo, & Zettel, 2015) leads us to be intrigued by this framing and eager to contribute to this line of inquiry vis-a-vis SLCE.

We elected to explore our learning through the use of an interview method from *Decoding the Disciplines* (Pace & Middendorf, 2004), which was developed to help faculty articulate their thinking about a difficult concept so as to make it more visible and explicit and thus, in turn, enable them to better help their students move toward a transformed understanding of the concept. Although our initial intent was to uncover each group member's thinking about reciprocity at the time of the interview and then track changes over time, we found that the probing nature of the interview itself, and the deep reflection it generated, led to changes in our understanding of reciprocity. Therefore, the research question this article addresses is how a collaborative self-study process among faculty generates learning – in our case, about reciprocity. This study contributes to SLCE and the scholarship of teaching and learning by using the Decoding method in a different field of practice to focus on the particular concept of reciprocity and as an innovative method for multidisciplinary self-study of faculty learning. To date, Decoding work has typically focused on cognitive bottlenecks in specific disciplines such as humanities, history, and geology (e.g., Ardizzone, Breithaupt, & Gutjahr, 2004; Shopkow, Diaz, Middendorf, & Pace, 2012; Zhu, Rehrey, Treadwell, & Johnson, 2012) and, to our knowledge, has not been used in SLCE or to investigate faculty learning around the concept of reciprocity.

We believe this approach can help practitioner-scholars – indeed, all partners in SLCE – reflect critically on and deepen understanding of key concepts – such as, but not limited to, reciprocity – and therefore has potential for enriching professional development, improving the practice of SLCE, and advancing research. After reviewing selected literature related to faculty learning in general and to learning the threshold concept of reciprocity specifically, we share our self-study approach (including the Decoding interview method), the learning the process generated amongst our group, and how shifts in our understanding of reciprocity occurred. We then offer reflections on our learning processes and outcomes and also pose questions for further inquiry.

Faculty Learning about Reciprocity

The counternormative nature of SL fosters learning not only by students but also by faculty (Clayton

& Ash, 2004; Clayton et al., 2013). Strategies to support faculty learning include faculty development programs such as workshops, consultations, and communities of practice (see Chism et al., 2013 for an overview). However, Neumann (2000) raises concerns about traditional faculty development initiatives because they "rarely position individual professors as potential sources of their own professional development, assuming, instead, that development is best done to them" (p. 1). Furthermore, O'Meara and Terosky (2010) argue that "faculty members' learning happens only when they have a hand in making that learning happen" (p. 45). Clayton and colleagues (2013) similarly suggest that innovative faculty learning interventions be explored, including approaches that are self-directed and co-created within a community of co-learners. Since the literature suggests learning about, teaching with, and partnering in SL is potentially transformative for faculty (Clayton & Ash, 2004), one way to conceptualize their learning is through the lens of perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1978, 1990) that occurs when learning a paradigm-shifting, or "threshold," concept.

The term "threshold concepts" grew out of work in the United Kingdom led by Meyer and Land (2003, 2005). It originally referred to those concepts in each discipline that must be learned before one can think like an expert in that discipline; it is also being used to explore the challenges faculty face in learning new pedagogies and practices, including but not limited to SL (e.g., Bunnell & Bernstein, 2012; King & Felten, 2012; Webb, 2015). Threshold concepts are transformative of one's understanding and, accordingly, troublesome to one's previous understanding, requiring movement through a liminal space in which one must let go of one's prevailing way of seeing and prior understanding (Meyer & Land, 2003). In other words, while difficult to learn, once learned they open new possibilities for understanding and practice.

The work on threshold concepts has theoretical underpinnings in transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1978). Mezirow (1990) defines transformation as:

> the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting on these new understandings. (p.14)

And he articulates (overlapping) phases of the process as including:

> … disorienting dilemma, self-examination, critical assessment of assumptions, recognition of

discontent, exploration of new roles, planning of a course of action, acquisition of knowledge and skills for new roles, increased competence and self-confidence in new roles, and reintegration of new perspectives into one's life. (2010, p. 94)

Mezirow (1978) sees transformation as being triggered by a disorienting dilemma, which unsettles and challenges our existing meaning schemes, followed by critical reflection or critical self-reflection on one's assumptions and taken for granted interpretations. However, critical reflection may not always generate transformative learning, especially if it is undertaken in isolation from others, since "personal meanings that we attribute to our experience are acquired and validated through human interaction and communication" (Mezirow, 1991, p. xiv). In other words, the meaning found inside the learner may become transformed in significant ways through discourse with others. Mezirow (1997) even goes so far as to say that discourse "is necessary to validate what and how one understands, or to arrive at a best judgment regarding a belief," concluding that "in this sense, learning is a social process, and discourse becomes central to meaning making" (p. 10).

Collaborative self-study is a process that can generate the necessary critical reflection, make space for the required discourse, and not only answer the call for a better understanding of how faculty members learn about and through SLCE but also serve as a method to generate their learning. It entails an examination of one's beliefs and actions as an educator (Whitehead, 1993), using a systematic and critical research process to examine one's practices (Foot, Crowe, Tollafield, & Allan, 2014; Samaras & Freese, 2009). While a self-study's focus on the self may raise concerns about inappropriate subjectivity in research, Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) counter such concerns by arguing that "the aim of self-study research is to provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm and settle" (p. 20). LaBoskey (2004) provides a comprehensive discussion of self-study method and articulates five key elements fundamental to high quality self-study: the process should be (a) self-focused and self-initiated, (b) aimed at improvement, (c) interactive, (d) inclusive of multiple qualitative methods; and (e) validated through a process of scrutiny by peers. Russell (2009) also offers that self-study should include "critical friends to ensure that data is interpreted from a range of perspectives" (p. 76). While individual self-study is common in some disciplines, such as teacher education, Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker (2009) suggest that the process can have greater impact if conducted within collaborative communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Following LaBoskey's guidelines, we used a group self-study

approach to inquire into how we ourselves understand and learn about the concept of reciprocity.

Although central to domestic and global SLCE, reciprocity has multiple, contested meanings in the SLCE literature (Dostilio, Brackmann, Edwards, Harrison, Kliewer, & Clayton, 2012). We find particularly useful the distinction between "thin" and "thick" versions of reciprocity that highlights the value of moving beyond mutual benefit to co-creation (Clayton et al., 2013):

> Minimally, reciprocity requires that everyone involved in the process benefit. Beyond mutual benefit, reciprocity in its "thick" (Jameson et al., 2011, p. 264) form means that students, community members, and faculty share voice and authority in determining questions, defining approaches, and contributing to knowledge construction and dissemination; through their interactions with one another they all experience learning that leads to new ways of thinking, perceiving and acting (Donahue, Bowyer, & Rosenberg, 2003; Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009). In other words, reciprocity in SL ultimately means that all participants are co-educators, co-learners, and co-generators of knowledge (Hess et al., 2011, Jameson et al., 2011; Kirby, 2010; Mondloch, 2009). (p. 246)

This understanding of reciprocity often entails a new way of thinking for academics given pervasive norms that "reinforce the distinct identities of faculty as educators and generators of knowledge, students as learners, and community members as recipients of academic expertise" (Clayton et al., 2013, p. 246). It involves 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, contextual, and favors mutual deference between laypersons and academics" (Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009, pp. 9-10). Tilley-Lubbs' (2009) autoethnographic examination of her own teaching with SL has been used to demonstrate how learning to partner reciprocally can be transformative, troublesome, and involve liminality – suggesting that reciprocity understood as co-creation may be a threshold concept for faculty learning about SL (Harrison & Clayton, 2012; Harrison et al., 2014).

If reciprocity is indeed a threshold concept, then faculty coming to understand it – especially in its "thick" framing – may involve transformative learning. Accounts of faculty members' struggles with the concept of reciprocity (e.g., Sharpe & Dear, 2013; Tilley-Lubbs, 2009) indicate that more research on how it is learned and more support in implementing it are both needed. Enhancing our understanding and our practice of reciprocity is important for faculty

teaching with SLCE because of the likelihood and consequences of unintended negative outcomes and the tendency for "students and universities to benefit more than the communities where service takes place" (Crabtree, 2008. p. 25). In addition to quality and impact of partnerships, the stakes also include student learning; as Giles and Eyler (2013) argue, "we are not likely to see powerful research on student outcomes in service-learning without a better understanding of how to enhance implementation of effective practice by faculty" (p. 59).

However, learning this concept may not be experienced by everyone in the same ways (Harrison et al., 2014). In fact, Meyer and Land (2006) acknowledge that the defining features of threshold concepts might be applicable in various degrees depending on the concept and the learner. To better understand these complexities, further study of faculty learning about reciprocity as a threshold concept is warranted. Here, we explore an approach to inquiry into such learning. Our purpose is to share insights about the process and the outcomes in order to contribute to knowledge in SLCE about methods of advancing and investigating faculty learning around this and other challenging concepts.

Our Process

Our self-study stemmed from a multidisciplinary faculty learning community on GSL that we formed to learn more about the pedagogy and each others' projects. We were especially interested in similarities and differences among our courses and wanted, in particular, to explore dimensions of our practice related to reciprocity – a value we were all committed to but also finding difficult to understand and enact. One group member suggested it would be helpful, to us and to other practitioner-scholars in SLCE, to study ourselves and our understanding of reciprocity more formally. To enhance trustworthiness of the study, two colleagues (who are first and last co-authors of this article) with backgrounds in SLCE and the scholarship of teaching and learning – Miller-Young and Clayton – were invited to contribute to all stages of the project – design, implementation, analysis, and article authorship. Importantly, they also served as critical friends, helping to ensure analysis from perspectives beyond the seven instructors whose learning is the focus of this study. The participation in data analysis and in the writing of this article by all nine authors served as a form of member checking that adds credibility to the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). During the early phase of our group's formation, three prospective participants withdrew from the project; two cited time limitations, competing research demands, and

health issues, and the third identified concerns with the proposed research method.

The seven faculty members who participated in the self-study have varying levels of experience with SLCE and come from a range of disciplinary backgrounds: biology, business, history, Indigenous studies, nursing, and social work. Each has taught a field school, which is an experiential learning opportunity that enhances coursework with a cross-cultural experience that occurs partially on the home campus and also for a defined period of time in a host community. While not all are officially designated as SL at Mount Royal University, field schools all have some of the components of the pedagogy, such as partnerships with host communities. Our field schools took place in Canada (Pettit), the Cook Islands (Calvert), the Dominican Republic (Gleeson and Underwood), Honduras (Lexier and Rathburn), and India (Dean).

Data Generation

Data collection for this study consisted of three stages: (a) conducting, audio recording, and transcribing Decoding interviews; (b) reviewing our own transcripts, completing individual written reflections on the interview process (referred to here as "interview reflections"), sharing them with one another, and discussing common themes; and (c) completing additional individual written reflections on the self-study process overall (referred to here as "individual self-study reflections"), followed by an audio recorded and transcribed group discussion.

Decoding interviews. Similar to the work on threshold concepts, the Decoding the Disciplines framework (Pace & Middendorf, 2004) was created as a means to study "bottleneck" or difficult concepts. The crucial mental operations an instructor uses when thinking about or enacting a difficult concept are explored through a semi-structured interview – a Decoding interview – that helps her to uncover and articulate her own thinking process (Pace & Middendorf, 2004). With reciprocity as the focal concept, we explored our thinking both through the Decoding interview itself and through a combination of individual and collaborative reflection on the interview and the self-study process more generally. In contrast to the purpose of Decoding the Disciplines – to surface how an instructor thinks about a difficult concept so as to better help her students to understand it – our primary purpose (although we certainly do anticipate that outcome) was to examine *changes in our understanding* of the concept and *how they occurred* so that we and other SLCE practitioner-scholars might better understand our own learning processes and better enact reciprocity.

The Decoding interview protocol (see Shopkow, Diaz, & Pace, 2013) requires two interviewers, at least

one of whom is unfamiliar with the discipline and/or concept under investigation. This cross-disciplinary approach is meant to help push the interviewee to ever more precise articulation of her thinking. Questions focus on how the interviewee thinks about the difficult concept, getting her to unpack her thinking process as much as possible. Interviewers use questions such as "How do you do that?" (e.g., make a particular type of connection between ideas, discern a complexity implicit in the concept), probing at the place where the interviewee cannot explain and reflecting a summary of her thinking back to her at an abstract level. For example, after Underwood described some of the early experiences that shaped her philosophy about working with community partners, an interviewer asked: "So is it fair to say that some of your initial concerns were fairly practical and then the deeper you got into things the more philosophical and value driven you became?" The interview continues until the interviewers have no further questions or the interviewee cannot explain her thinking any further.

For this project, each self-study group member was interviewed after the conclusion of her 2014 GSL course. The first four interviews were conducted by two interviewers external to the self-study group and experienced with the Decoding interview protocol. The remaining four were conducted either by one of these external interviewers and one of the first four interviewees or by two of the initial interviewees (who had watched other interviews until they became comfortable interviewing). In all cases at least one interviewer represented a different academic discipline than that of the interviewee.

During the interviews, after the initial question was posed about how the interviewee tries to enact reciprocity in her SLCE partnerships, each of us started drawing upon examples from our past experiences to illustrate our understanding of reciprocity. Since the structure of the interview involves continually pushing the interviewee to explain further, the questions emerge as the interview progresses. As an example, in one case, after an interviewee described how she believed she had developed a strong partner relationship, one of the two interviewers followed up with: "How do you evaluate that the relationship is still strong, either while you are preparing for the next course or while you are out there with the students and with the community?" and "Do you consciously and explicitly go through that evaluation process?" After an interviewee described a difficult experience in which she had not enacted reciprocity, an interviewer asked: "What was it about that experience that bothered you or caused you to think that?" and "What would you do differently next time?" When any interviewee used a new word she had not yet explained (e.g., "reflexive," "leadership," "flexibili-

ty") an interviewer asked "What do you mean by [that word]?" and "Can you explain your thinking about how [that word] relates to reciprocity?" Interviews ranged from 50 to 86 minutes. Transcripts of each member's interview were made available to other members of the self-study team after completion of her own interview and interview reflection.

Interview reflections. To explore the utility of the Decoding interview method for uncovering and deepening our thinking about reciprocity, each participant independently reviewed her interview transcript and then wrote an "interview reflection" guided by two questions: (a) Where in the interview were you pushed and/or did you come to a realization that surprised you? and (b) How did the process of the interview and/or points of discomfort change how you might structure future field school SL projects? These written reflections were shared with the group, and, in order to identify and explore common themes, we subsequently engaged in a series of informal group discussions of one another's thinking and interview experiences.

Self-study reflections. Through these conversations we quickly realized that the interview process and our written and collaborative reflection on it had caused our perspectives on reciprocity to shift. We were becoming more aware of our own and each other's assumptions and perspectives and thus began to wonder whether or not we might be experiencing transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991). We, therefore, set out to examine further how the Decoding interview and self-study process had influenced our understandings of reciprocity by completing individual self-study reflections structured with the DEAL model of critical reflection (Ash & Clayton, 2009) in which we each (a) Described our experience of the self-study; (b) Examined that experience by responding to the prompt "what parts of this process have been most useful to your learning about reciprocity and what themes emerged from your experience?"; and (c) Articulated our Learning using the standard prompts for this step – "What did you learn?", "How did you learn it?", "Why does that learning matter?", and "What will you do as a result of this learning?"

The depth of our first group discussions, following individual reflection on the interviews, led to the decision to audio record and transcribe the dialogue in the collaborative reflection on the self-study process. In a 90-minute group meeting, we shared our thinking in these individual self-study reflections orally and discussed common themes, similarities, and differences.

Data Analysis

Our original purpose in engaging in the Decoding interview was to better understand our own thinking

about reciprocity. However, we came to see the Decoding interview itself as a "disorienting dilemma" (Mezirow, 1978, 1990) that generated deeper learning. After completing the iterative process of individual written reflections and group discussions described above, we conducted a formal analysis of our thinking as it had been captured in the reflective writing and discussion transcripts.

Our analysis, conveyed in the next two sections, had two foci. The first focus was on changes in our understandings of the concept of reciprocity, which we determined by comparing our baseline understandings expressed in the Decoding interview transcripts (informed by previous experience) with our changing understandings expressed in individual and group reflection products. The second was on specific ways in which the study itself contributed to those changes, which we determined by examining all of the data sources for indicators of sources of these changes.

After an initial inductive reading of all the data strengthened our emerging sense of ourselves as undergoing transformative learning, we conducted a qualitative content analysis (Glaser & Laudel, 2013) and coded for transformation using Mezirow's (2010) suggestion that a narrative analysis should look for evidence of questioning one's own thinking, shifts in perspectives, changes in points of view or assumptions, analysis of assumptions, and new awareness and openness to other worldviews. Finally, having documented some evidence of changed as well as unchanged understandings of reciprocity, we then examined the data for specific aspects of the process that participants found to be particularly influential.

Our Learning

Regardless of discipline and SLCE experience, all of us had thought about reciprocity during past partnership experiences; the self-study process instigated new thinking for all of us while leaving some of our prior understandings intact. In our individual and group reflections, we found evidence of each of us questioning our assumptions about reciprocity, shifting our perspectives, expanding our awareness, and becoming open to other worldviews, which led to planning new courses of action. In this section we illustrate some examples of how our understandings of reciprocity did and did not change through the self-study process.

In their Decoding interviews, Rathburn and Lexier shared an initial belief that they had structured their course reciprocally because they had consulted with local community members and decided upon tasks that aligned with their partner's requests. During one of these tasks – building a bridge for local school children – they witnessed how attempts to engage in reciprocity can go awry. To get the job done quickly their students started building a bridge for the community. But they did so before the community members were present, and it turned out to be improperly placed. It was only when community members were working with the students to build the bridge in a better location that the task was completed successfully. Sharing this experience in the Decoding interview process led to further discussion about shifting SLCE projects from doing *for* to doing *with* community partners. After recalling this experience of how they had focused primarily on meeting the needs of community partners, they began to realize some of the problematic aspects of this activity and how they had defaulted to a deficit-based perspective of the community, which may have also influenced their students' thinking. During the Decoding process Rathburn reflected that she "was trying to not put too much ownership on the partners and not trying to put too much work on their end"; her insight – "I was trying to do most of it myself so that we could just help them - I guess that *is* helping them instead of working *with* them" – demonstrates the complexity and importance of aligning our motivations with our actions as we try to engage in reciprocal partnerships in SLCE.

Gleeson, for whom reciprocal approaches were part of her disciplinary training in nursing, experienced a different kind of change. She expressed in her interview that she was fairly comfortable with her ability to enact reciprocity with her community partners, stating:

> I just naturally do it…it is a way of being with clients…. It is just part of how I practice… we are constantly checking in that we are on track, that this is what they want, and is there anything else that we could be doing?

However, she later commented in her self-study reflection that thinking more about the concept of tacit knowledge as a result of this study "made me really think 'Hey, am I really doing it, or am I just saying I am doing it? If I am, how do I do that?'" and helped her realize the importance of more explicitly modeling reciprocal approaches with communities for her students – for example, by encouraging students to frequently ask community members "check-in" questions regarding the suitability of a planned project and to modify their plans accordingly.

Underwood described a new appreciation of how reciprocity is a difficult concept for students to grasp. The Decoding interview first pushed her to recognize the years of experience that have informed her understanding of and approach to reciprocal partnerships. This, combined with hearing how colleagues from other disciplines found reciprocity to be a difficult

concept, led her to a new realization that she articulated in her self-study reflection:

> It really helped clarify for me that for students, of course they are going to find this a bottleneck concept! They haven't had the experience we have had, they haven't been out there… it reminded me not to brush it over as much as I was, and think 'Why aren't you getting this? We talked about partnerships in day one of nursing!'

Underwood described this realization of her own tacit thinking as an "a-ha" moment and explained that it inspired her to plan two new strategies for her teaching: (a) similar to Gleeson, to be more explicit and transparent in her approach to reciprocity with her students, and (b) to change her expectations of how quickly they should come to understand reciprocity. She also found the interview experience – "the process of being listened to and helping clarify ideas" – so valuable that she plans to incorporate more discussion in her future teaching and research involving students.

For Pettit, the concept of reciprocity with host communities was integral to her disciplinary training in Indigenous Studies. In her interview she said, "The idea of reciprocity has always been on our minds, likely because we are all too aware of researchers taking advantage of First Nations (Indigenous) peoples." Not being familiar with the discussions of reciprocity in the SLCE literature, she realized that it was in fact the concept of "service" that had been difficult for her. In her interview reflection she explained that she had been wondering whether her course could really be classified as SL:

> I kept struggling with the idea of doing something for the communities when in reality this whole time we have been doing something with those communities. I have intentionally steered away from the idea that First Nations (Indigenous) need our help. That is simply not the case and in the past that "help" by non-Natives has resulted in a great deal of hurt and devastation.

She came to realize that she and her students were both serving and being served in their work with their partners: "We are indeed helping groups when we share their message by inviting them to campus to do presentations, etc. Likewise, we are serving the university community by sharing what students take away from the field school." She concluded that her course was an example of "reverse SL" because she felt the community partners "helped" the university community more than the other way around. These comments indicate that Pettit developed a more complex understanding of the word "service" and greater awareness of the reasons it is problematic for her. We

speculate that the concept of service, which is closely related to reciprocity, may be a barrier for other faculty who might otherwise engage in SLCE. Pettit also began to think about changing some of her teaching and learning strategies, noting "We have them write many reflective assignments, but an interview might be useful as well. This was starting to become apparent to me during the oral exams we did but was solidified for me during the Decoding interview."

Although Dean also found the self-study to be helpful in many of the ways described above, it was difficult to discern changes in her understanding of reciprocity in her reflection products. From the beginning of this study she questioned whether full reciprocity was truly possible in her partnerships. In fact, she had long been concerned that having a partner fully involved in developing and implementing GSL activities might be too idealistic. She wrote in her interview reflection that she plans to continue involving – where she can – partner agencies while remaining cognizant that this could be a burden for some. She also said, in the final group reflection, that she was "questioning [her] own understanding of reciprocity," noting:

> it is easy to get to the superficial side and say: 'We are going in and we are trying not to do any harm,' but to really deconstruct what that means and what that needs to look like is, I think, an impossible feat. It is something we should strive towards, for sure, but it is something we are not really ever going to get to.

Collectively, we are still questioning our own understandings of reciprocity; however, the self-study renewed our commitment to striving toward it in our practice while also complicating our sense of what doing that involves. Calvert gave voice to a powerful realization regarding the benefits – and risks – of the sort of learning and reflection on learning we experienced in this self-study:

> I am more aware, but also more wary, of misreading the impact and potential for a successful relationship with the host community partner. I also have thought on several occasions that my life was easier before we started this process – fear of damage is now a much bigger part of the equation.

Influences on Our Learning

The second focus of analysis concerned how changes in our understanding of reciprocity happened. Our reflections indicated that the Decoding interview played a key role in our learning, as did our disciplinary differences. Also, both somewhat inadvertently fostered a climate of trust that allowed the self-study process to unfold productively.

According to our interview reflections, the repetitive questioning during the Decoding interview was the most valuable part of the process, pushing us to explain and clarify our thinking and deconstruct the ways each of us had come to understand reciprocity from our past experiences more deeply than we would have on our own. The probing nature of the Decoding interview also does not allow for self-conscious self-editing but rather invites the candor that is part of thinking out loud. As Dean noted in her interview reflection, for example:

> It is one thing to write about your thoughts and to reflect on them, but it is something entirely different to have to explain your thoughts and be questioned on each detail. Participating in the Decoding interview made me re-examine my own thinking and practice; it challenged me to think about myself and my beliefs.

However, because of the repeated nature of the questioning, it was difficult for most of us to identify the specific points in our Decoding interviews that pushed us the most. Collectively, we agreed that being asked to further define a word we had just used and being asked "How do you do that?" and "How do you know?" (e.g., that you are enacting reciprocity) were the most challenging moments.

The Decoding interview itself was also important in our functioning as a collaborative learning community and generating a climate of trust. Its structure not only gave us the necessary permission to push one another's thinking, but also did not allow us to settle for superficial answers to questions and required us to be self-disclosing and honest with one another. Since the purpose of the Decoding interview is, explicitly, to support the interviewee in better understanding her own thinking, the process – including the pushing – is inherently in the service of the interviewee's own learning, which also helps her to see the interviewers as collaborators. This was evident because, while each of us described the Decoding interview as somewhat difficult and uncomfortable, we also each demonstrated a willingness to admit to shortcomings or mistakes during our interviews. For example, Underwood shared an influential early experience in which she realized she had not fully considered her host country's context when planning a lesson related to asthma prevention:

> Well it just didn't fit; it did not fit at all…Wrong audience, wrong topic…All of a sudden I was there and I realized, wow, there is no school for children. There is no water; the children are thirsty; there are unpaved roads; all these determinants of health right in your face…And I thought I had something to offer about asthma? Oh, so narrow! It was not the right population,

not the right issue, not the right setting.

This willingness to be pushed and to admit mistakes requires high levels of trust. Without it the constant questioning and pushing integral to Decoding interviews is likely to generate resistance to the process and thus significantly limit the learning potential. We frequently commented in our discussions on how our trust in each other facilitated sharing emergent ideas and ultimately helped us recognize several inconsistencies between our values and our actions.

In addition, although our differences initially created anxiety for some members of the group, in the end we concluded that it was these very differences that had perhaps the most significant impact on our learning through the self-study process. At the start of this research, disciplinary differences – ranging from theoretical to methodological to linguistic – as well as differences in cultural background, roles within the university, and experiences with SLCE, appeared as possible barriers to the collaborative self-study process. For example, both Rathbun and Lexier shared an initial reluctance to get involved in the self-study due not only to concerns about time but also to reservations regarding the diversity of the group. But they later articulated how valuable others' perspectives had been to their own learning. In Lexier's words from her self-study reflection, "While it has been difficult sometimes to understand other approaches and where people are coming from in the literature…it has been incredibly positive to do that… Each person brought such a different perspective to the discussion." Along these same lines, Gleeson noted, "we learn a lot from each other; [even] though we have the same kind of issues, we have different lenses." In other words, the differences looming large at the start of this project turned out to be assets.

Having distinct disciplinary homes was also important in establishing trust. During the interview, the fact that at least one of the interviewers had a different disciplinary background than the interviewee helped to de-personalize the probing; in other words, it was perceived to be part of an interviewer's job to represent a naive listener. During the rest of the self-study, our disciplinary differences provided some safety in that there was less fear of being judged (as one might be by peers with strong expectations regarding one another's knowledge and skills). It also helped that our courses were also not in competition with one another for university resources. Finally, GSL – and, therefore, opportunities to come together across courses and disciplines to share questions and concerns related to implementing it – was relatively new at our university; we realized early on that we each had been looking for a community within which to share our experiences and concerns. These few

factors, in addition to our interest in each other's learning as the focus of our study, made it safer to share proud moments and ideas we felt strongly about as well as uncertainties and stories of what had not worked in our practice; this was essential to our collective learning.

Finally, the overall design of the self-study was an important influence on our learning. Rathburn explicitly commented in her self-study reflection that she found the entire process – not just the interview itself but also the individual and group reflections – provided important tools that helped her challenge her own understanding of reciprocity. We agreed this had been the case for each of us. As Underwood succinctly put it in her self-study reflection:

> The importance of the cycle of reflection-articulation-clarification-discussion-reflection as an effective learning strategy has been strengthened for me … going back and re-looking at our interviews and seeing what we said and trying to come down to a part where I felt like I was trying to synthesize it; how could I state what reciprocity is to me now, having gone through this process?

In summary, and perhaps counterintuitively, we found that beginning the self-study with the Decoding interview process generated a feeling of disorientation but also fostered a climate of trust. There is also, we found, a great deal to be said for jumping into the deep end of a new learning experience together, without much in the way of slow and gentle building of confidence in one another and the process. Especially when undertaken in the context of a collaborative self-study focused on learning around a common concept that is of great interest to all participants, the Decoding interview has a somewhat surprising community-building function.

Reflections on Our Learning Processes and Outcomes

Harrison, Clayton, and Tilley-Lubbs (2014) observe that "service-learning practitioner-scholars may be especially inclined toward an epistemology in which knowledge construction is never finished or complete" (p. 15). This resonates strongly with our group. While the Decoding interview was part of our research method, it was also the catalyst for generating new perspectives on and questions about reciprocity – a process that is by no means complete and, in fact, may just be beginning. Such liminality, or state of unsettledness in understanding and practice in which one is letting go of previous "knowledge" but is still in the process of achieving a transformed perspective, may be indicative of the complexities inherent in reciprocity and the many nuances and lay-

ers involved in understanding it.

Our self-study resulted in new questioning, new perspectives, and new awareness related to the value of examining the concept of reciprocity and the role of group dialogue in generating learning – although the specific nature of these changes was somewhat different for all of us. The differences in our learning, which emerged throughout the self-study process, confirm the notion in the literature on faculty learning of threshold concepts (e.g., King & Felten, 2012) that learning is likely to be experienced differently by each faculty member. For example, some of us developed deeper understandings related to the importance of more fully including community members as partners in SLCE and found our previous approach to partnerships disheartening, while others remained unchallenged in our thinking about reciprocity. Some of us struggled to understand and work with the variety of disciplinary perspectives represented in the group. For some of us, new perspectives emerged during the Decoding interview itself, while for others it was the later collaborative reflection that generated new questions and insights. For some of us shifts in our understanding of reciprocity came relatively easily, and for others making them was more difficult, both emotionally and intellectually – suggesting the troublesome nature of this threshold concept.

Our challenges related to learning about reciprocity, interestingly, did not appear to align with years of SLCE experience but seemed to be linked with disciplinary differences. For example, Calvert, a business professor with over 20 years of SL experience but little disciplinary training related to the pedagogy's underlying principles, came to better understand the benefits of co-generating knowledge through long-term reciprocal community partnerships. By contrast, Dean, a social worker, and nurses Gleeson and Underwood, who had fewer years of experience with SLCE, believed themselves to be well versed in reciprocal practice by virtue of their disciplinary backgrounds; they struggled to let go of their conviction that they were already fully enacting reciprocity. We all agreed that the collaborative learning process helped us better understand the viewpoints of other disciplines and that engaging with others' perspectives increased our capacity to learn in this and, we believe, future collaborations and partnerships.

Despite our stated desire to engage more reciprocally with our host partners, the majority of the changes we identified as desirable in our GSL practice involve our students rather than our community partners. We plan to help students learn about reciprocity by articulating our own understandings of the concept and its centrality in SLCE and by providing more opportunities for critical reflection, such as bringing students in different courses together to col-

laboratively examine the relationship dynamics with our host partners. Dean, for example, has used her learning to better challenge student assumptions about service by deconstructing definitions of global citizenship and international "helping" (using resources such as, for example, Andreotti's (2006) article on soft versus critical global citizenship and Hermann's (2015) documentary, which challenges why we fail to help at home). These learning strategies will now form a larger part of the pre-departure planning process of Dean's GSL field schools.

However, while we articulated that we needed and wanted to work harder to ensure reciprocity with our partners, none of us identified a concrete and specific plan for doing so. Lexier's words from her self-study reflection offer a representative example of the limited extent to which we converted new understandings of reciprocity into action steps:

> I realize I need to work harder to ensure that the voices of our community partners are heard throughout the entire planning and execution of our field schools and that, while it might be difficult to establish reciprocity in these relationships, they are fundamentally important to what I am hoping to accomplish.

This focus on changes to our practice related to our students but not to our community partners only became obvious to us after analyzing our reflection products, providing evidence not only of the troublesomeness of the concept but also of the value of our self-study for our own learning.

We also have realized a dilemma: how to be respectful of our partners' time and also commit to co-creating with them. Many of us initially believed we were enacting reciprocity by limiting the obligations of community partners in "our" GSL projects. Through the process of this self-study, however – including the writing of this article – we are coming to see this as evidence of our own lingering deficit-based perspective, emerging from our somewhat paternalistic sense that we need to protect our partners from the demands of full collaboration. While we continue to be concerned about burdening partners and are uncertain how best to determine what are appropriate time commitments on everyone's part, we also now see that our still evolving definitions of reciprocity may be one source of the difficulty. For example, Dean struggles with whether reciprocity requires that all partners contribute in "equal measure" and, in turn, whether that means contributing in the same ways or in equitable proportion; she believes it is appropriate to use the resources of the "western" academy to help turn the ideas and experiences of colleagues in less-funded regions of the world into research but is unsure if such a stance is sufficiently

asset-based to align with alternative conceptions of reciprocity (i.e., co-creation) that were developed and refined during the self-study. She continues to reflect about how all partners can best contribute to the GSL projects she facilitates and so continues to problematize her own understanding of reciprocity.

Despite the realization of our continued conceptual and practical struggles with reciprocity, our new learnings have helped us to take a few steps forward. We are now more deeply committed to "ongoing dialogue, honest feedback, and owning up and rectifying mistakes" (Sharpe & Dear, 2013, p. 56). Ultimately, the proof of how and how well the self-study generated learning will only come if we are courageous enough to continue to work to enhance our practice.

Questions for Further Inquiry

Reflecting on our self-study process when writing this article, we pondered lessons our experience might suggest for other SLCE practitioner-scholars. However, we find it difficult to articulate substantive recommendations. Some of the thinking we have shared here has been about the concept of reciprocity in SLCE, some about faculty development processes, and some about faculty learning. We have shared methods – collaborative self-study, Decoding interviews, qualitative analysis – that we find deeply congruent with the values and commitments of the SLCE movement and our GSL practice. Our work together over the past year has woven these various bodies of thought together in ways that have been emergent and responsive to where we have been, both individually and collectively, in this process. We came to view this process in terms of transformational learning. Given how contextualized our process has been to the composition of our group and to the methods used to engage with one another, it is unlikely that the particulars of our experience can, in fact, generate a set of actionable implications for others' practice and research beyond those already noted: (a) the value of the Decoding interview process and structure in pushing learners to ever-deeper grappling with prior and emergent understandings, (b) the importance of multidisciplinarity among the members of a self-study group who come together with common learning goals around shared pedagogical practices, (c) the need for discipline-external interviewers and critical friends to ask challenging questions and not settle for superficial answers, and (d) the challenges (faced by interviewers and interviewees alike) of retaining a focus on faculty member's own learning in the face of strong norms that define them as teachers and that turn their attention repeatedly to their students when the topic under discussion is learning outcomes and processes.

We do feel confident, however, in posing questions that may have the potential to serve as starting points for others wishing to build on this work or conduct a similar study, and so we wrap up our discussion by exploring three questions. The first question concerns the relative contribution of collaborative self-study as an approach to generating and investigating transformational learning among SLCE faculty. Cousin (2010) noted that the work on threshold concepts has yet to develop a "settled methodological framework" (p. 7); and Harrison, Clayton, & Tilley-Lubbs (2014) propose autoethnography as a potentially powerful approach for faculty to use in examining their own teaching with SLCE so as to advance their understanding of threshold concepts such as reciprocity. Autoethnography is well-suited to help turn disorientation into transformed understanding in the context of the counternormative pedagogy of SLCE, these authors suggest, as it "calls the … instructor's attention to the ways in which her practice is shaped and constrained by the assumptions of the surrounding cultural context and by associated dynamics of power and privilege" (p. 13).

Other than in terms of data collection methods and number of inquirers, we are, however, hard-pressed to see significant differences between autoethnography and our own self-study process, either in purpose or underlying process dynamics. Just as we experienced in the Decoding interview process, autoethnography can help faculty "better understand the sources and significance of their own learning challenges and successes and making visible to them the evolution of their own thinking and practice" (Harrison et al., 2014, p. 13). Similarly as with our individual and collaborative reflection, autoethnography shows the inquirer patterns in her own thinking and practice and positions her to "better align her knowledge and beliefs with her practice, grounded in an evolving understanding of why she does what she does and how, in doing it, she reifies and/or problematizes the structures and systems within which she operates" (p. 13). Thus, the first question emerges: Might we inquire more deeply into faculty learning of threshold concepts by systematically integrating the extended time frames that generally characterize autoethnography with the insight-generating potential of collaborative methods of inquiry – structuring what we think of as "collaborative autoethnographic self-study"? The many times we helped one another see blind spots in our reasoning and problematized what we took to be tacit knowledge make us wonder about the even greater potential of explicitly wedding the methods and timelines of self-study and autoethnography in professional development and research on faculty learning in SLCE.

Our second question has to do with the relationship between trust among learners and transformational learning. We have explained that we came into the collaborative self-study process with wide ranging previous experience, disciplinary backgrounds, and familiarity with scholarship related to teaching and learning. And we have identified a few of the factors that may have nurtured a climate of trust among the members of our self-study and our two critical friends – factors such as the structure and purpose of the Decoding interview, our diverse disciplinary backgrounds, and the lack of competition between our courses. We have implied in reflecting on our own experience but have not yet examined with any rigor potential linkages between the deep level of trust we worked within and the transformational nature of our learning process. As noted earlier, Mezirow (2010) points to the social dimensions of the transformative learning process, and he characterizes such learning with terms such as "disorienting," "critical assessment," "self-examination," "exploration of new roles," and "reintegration of new perspectives." This is not easy or safe work to do in the company of others. It is risky enough to become aware of one's own taken for granted assumptions and interpretations and to see their misfit with one's practice. But to do this work in the presence of others, especially known colleagues whose professional if not also personal respect one wishes to maintain, would be challenging in the absence of deep interpersonal trust.

During the analysis phase of our study we frequently noted the number of comments that had been made acknowledging the unusual level of trust participants felt through the process, often in the context of discussing the difficult moments experienced in the Decoding interview or the collaborative reflection activities. But it is only now that we recognize a significant question in our midst: What is the role of trust in collaborative transformative learning spaces? Cranton (2006) suggests that "authentic relationships" aid transformative learning and offers as an example teachers and students "choos[ing] to act so as to foster the growth and development of each other's being" (p. 7). Authentic relationships surely include high levels of trust, and we suggest it will be important to explore further the conditions under which the needed levels of trust come to exist in collaborative faculty self-study and the specific ways that trust influences participants' willingness to go to the depths of vulnerability required for transformational learning.

Third and very much relatedly, we find intriguing the question of the role and meaning – and potential limitations – of "safe space" in learning threshold concepts and in inquiring into that learning. On the surface of it, the concept of safe space (Aaro & Clemens, 2013) seems an obvious and necessary feature of any collaborative learning process, especially

when the learners are studying themselves and when the topic in question is one they value highly but sometimes struggle to understand and enact. Through all stages of our work together we often, both directly and indirectly, took steps to ensure that the disorienting process of critical self-examination not be experienced as unacceptably risky. For example, those of us who served as interviewers in the Decoding interview process underwent training and had opportunities to observe interviews so as to build our confidence in taking on this new and difficult role within our group. We also designed the self-study to include, for example, individual written reflection before collaborative oral reflection, giving us each time and space to develop our thoughts privately before sharing them for public critique and questioning. These elements of the process helped make it safe.

At the same time, however, we recognize that the level of trust our group experienced is not always going to be present in processes such as these. With low levels of trust, many of the activities in such a self-study process could be threatening indeed. It is intriguing to consider whether, especially in such a case, group members' efforts to make the collaborative inquiry "safe" might actually subtly contradict or inappropriately buffer against the important reality of the not-safe emotional and intellectual tasks of inviting disorientation, engaging in critical self-examination, problematizing deeply ingrained assumptions, and integrating into one's being new and counternormative perspectives and identities. Would such protection of one another from the more honest engagement with ambiguity and the downright discomfort that movement through the liminal spaces associated with learning threshold concepts requires actually interfere with the transformative learning process? Borrowing from Arao and Clemens (2013), is "safe space" either "realistic, compatible, or appropriate" (p. 138) when our purpose is to generate and inquire into learning around an explicitly troublesome and transformative concept (i.e., reciprocity)? What might happen if we, as Arao and Clemens suggest, frame our "space" not as "safe" but rather as "brave" – not evoking the illusion of safety but rather honoring the reality of the courage participants draw on as they push themselves and one another through hard questions? Engaging in transformative learning is challenging; perhaps if a participant in a collaborative self-study is able to see herself as courageous rather than in need of safety she is not only more apt to be trusting and trustworthy but also better equipped to persist through the unsettledness of the liminal space she must traverse as she learns troublesome and transformative threshold concepts. Our third question is thus: Might framing the space for

collaborative self-study of learning – related to concepts that are by their nature potentially identity- and paradigm-shifting – in ways that make risk visible be more authentic, more effective, and ultimately more conducive to building and maintaining trust? We wonder how the balance and tension between framing an inquiry, or other space, as "safe" or "brave" might influence the findings of future collaborations.

Still Liminal but Moving Forward Together

Autoethnography has been suggested as one way to support faculty as learners (Harrison et al., 2014), and some scholars have written about their own troublesome experiences with reciprocity in SL (Tilley-Lubbs, 2009; Sharpe & Dear, 2013). Our study adds to this literature by inquiring into how a multidisciplinary community of practice and the Decoding method can be used as a way to both study and generate faculty learning about threshold concepts such as reciprocity. Grounded in the theory of transformative learning and the use of critical reflection on experience to generate learning, our analysis shows that the Decoding interview and the multidisciplinary nature of our group were both important factors in developing the community and trust necessary for this study to generate learning. These findings may be useful for colleagues seeking to support other faculty or critically reflect on their own practice, particularly within a community of practice. Findings may also raise important questions about how further collaborative inquiry within and across different SLCE contexts could yield new insights about the value of integrating methods from self-study and autoethnography for professional development and research on faculty learning; the conditions needed to foster trust and the role trust plays in transformative learning processes; and the significance of the choice to frame learning spaces as "safe" or not. Such insights have potential to advance our collective understanding of the dynamics of co-learning and co-generation of knowledge within but also transcending SLCE.

Harrison, Clayton, and Tilley-Lubbs (2014) suggest it is conceivable – perhaps likely – that "reciprocity and – for that matter, any threshold concept – will not be fully mastered" (p. 15). While we agree that the concept of reciprocity may be too complex and counternormative for full mastery, for we still find ourselves in a liminal space, this study has helped us recognize that it is often we, the instructors who get in the way of understanding and enacting reciprocal partnerships. Despite a desire for reciprocity, our analysis revealed that we remain driven by the academy's norms, continuing to position ourselves as separate from the community instead of expanding our role boundaries (Conville & Kinnell, 2010).

While it would certainly be simpler to unlearn what we now know and return to the "easier" life Victoria referred to, the experience of this self-study leaves us committed to ongoing learning through our community of practice and to furthering the scholarly conversation on this topic.

Notes

[1] Throughout this article, the term "faculty" refers to all instructors, including professional staff and administrators who teach with service-learning as well as faculty members.

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