

# Boundary Workers and Their Importance to Community-University Partnerships

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## Abstract

*As community-university partnerships become more common, it is becoming increasingly apparent that challenges emerge whenever groups as different as universities and communities attempt to work together. These challenges are not yet well understood and new analytical approaches are urgently needed that frame the problems and suggest avenues by which they can be overcome. This paper employs the lens of boundary work to consider the ways in which higher education faculty, when they engage in activities at the intersection of the university and the community, experience dilemmas that are essentially those of boundary workers. This analysis is intended to suggest ways of providing support for faculty when they experience conflicts, tension, and a perceived lack of credibility in community-university partnership work.*

As community-university partnerships become more common throughout the world, including in South Africa, it is becoming increasingly apparent that challenges emerge whenever groups as different as universities and communities attempt to work together. These challenges are not yet well understood and new analytical approaches are urgently needed that frame the problems and suggest avenues by which they can be overcome. This paper argues for the value of the analytical framework of boundary work as a way to understand and address these challenges.

Faculty who engage in community-university partnerships are positioned—powerfully or not—on both or either sides of the university-community boundary. Employing the lens of boundary work and its insights into role tensions, this paper considers the ways in which higher education faculty, when they engage in activities at the intersection of the university and community, experience dilemmas that are essentially those of boundary workers. This boundary work analysis is ultimately intended to suggest better ways of providing support for faculty when they experience conflicts, tension and a perceived lack of credibility of this community-university partnership work.

To make the examination of boundary work concrete, this article focuses on two quite different South African service learning partnerships, each of which attempts to link the core educational mission of higher education to service to community groups. In each partnership, the work of one higher education faculty is spotlighted. As we shall see, the experiences of the two faculty members were quite different, with their boundary work the result of complex intersections of roles, knowledge, discourses, and tools of mediation.

This paper begins by summarizing theoretical concepts central to understanding the work involved in service learning partnerships. We begin with the concept of boundary work and then consider the concept of boundary work within the theoretical frameworks of communities of practice and activity theory. These theoretical lenses are then used to consider two South African cases of service learning partnerships.

## **Educators as ‘Boundary Workers’ in Service Learning**

Drawing largely on work in critical pedagogy and critical postmodernism (Anzaldúa 1987; Giroux 1992) a number of authors have recently suggested that we begin to view service learning as a form of border pedagogy (Hayes and Cuban 1997; Skilton-Sylvester and Erwin 2000; Taylor 2002). They argue that the metaphors of “borders”, “border-crossing” and “borderland” are useful and important as a “compelling starting point for describing and rethinking the nature of service learning” (Hayes and Cuban 1997, 74). Mitchell (2008) in a recent article on traditional versus critical service learning, also alludes to these debates and to the usefulness of such lenses in transforming service learning.

When the work of faculty members is framed as boundary workers in service learning, a number of important questions emerge:

- What are the histories, practices, and roles that impact on their “boundary worker” identities?
- In what ways does the boundary worker position herself/get positioned at the interface of the university and the community?
- In what ways do tensions and contradictions that arise in activity systems — and particularly as a result of two different communities of practice — impact on the identities of the educator?
- How much power and control does she have in resolving these in the service learning partnership?

To begin to address these questions, it is helpful to look at two related bodies of analysis: the literature on communities of practice and activity theory. Each in its own way raises interesting possibilities about the nature and challenges of boundary work.

## **Communities of Practice**

A developing body of research in the human sciences explores the situated character of human understanding and communication, and takes as its focus the relationship between learning and the social situations in which that learning occurs. Lave and Wenger (1991), in describing situated learning, use the concept of “communities of practice.” Communities of practice are those contexts that situate learners in authentic, collaborative, and reflective practices. According to Wenger (1998), we are constantly engaging in pursuits in which we interact with each other. This collective learning results in practices that reflect both the “pursuit of our enterprises as well as the social

relations that go with this” (Wenger, 1991, 45). Wenger argues that these “practices” are the property of a kind of community created over a period of time by the ‘sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise’ (Wenger, 1998, 45). It is these practices that Lave and Wenger refer to as “communities of practice.”

Because they involve the intersection of multiple communities of practice, partnerships pose special challenges to the “communities of practice” analysis and point to the importance of the concept of boundary work. That is to say, to understand partnerships, we need to move beyond understanding the activities, relationships, and particular dynamics of engagement and participation within communities of practice — we need to move to looking at the relationships between and across such communities which is where partnership work is located. It is the ‘particular dynamics of engagement and participation’ (Wolfson and Willinsky 1998) that need to be understood.

Two features of community-university partnerships suggest how they are boundary work: these are an “expanded community” and a “dual but interrelated object” (McMillan 2008). In the first instance, service learning partnerships involve a larger community than the traditional university-based one. These communities bring with them different ways of engaging in the world, they have different histories with specific tools of mediation, and have access to knowledge and ways of knowing that could challenge the students, and thereby the activity systems, in significant ways. The second feature—a dual but interrelated object—refers to the fact that there are both learning and service goals to be achieved through the service learning. Although different, these two are inseparable as it is through the service that the students learn, and it is through the learning that service gets rendered.

The role of the boundary worker is thus important in relationships between a community of practice and the outside world (Wenger 1998). Boundary workers have the potential to make new connections across communities of practice; they can enable co-ordination and, if they are experienced, they open new possibilities for meaning and therefore for learning. In service learning, boundary workers could involve faculty, community members and even possibly students themselves.

In a subsequent section we will examine the boundary worker role of two faculty in two very different service learning courses. The tasks of boundary workers—the dilemmas, diversity of roles, and array of challenges—will be examined in community-university partnerships carried out through service learning courses over the two year period of 2004 to 2005 both at the University of Cape Town (UCT). As we shall see, these cases raise intriguing questions about the nature of boundary work that may be necessary if community-university partnerships are to be successful. Before we look at the actual cases, we will strengthen the “communities of practice” analysis by adding activity theory.

## **From Communities of Practice to Activity Theory**

The “communities of practice” lens, important as it is, does not fully prepare us for understanding the complexity of service learning partnership activities. Situated learning and the work of a number of post-Vygotskians may be helpful in this regard. Vygotsky (1978) argued that all learning happens socially, then individually (i.e., we first learn it mediated by someone else or some other tool, that is language or a computer, and then we internalize it ourselves).

Engeström (1999a, 1999b) has been one of the key people in developing the activity theory framework. He argues for “three generations” of activity theory. In first generation activity theory there are three essential elements in any activity system: subject(s), object(s), and tool(s) (i.e., largely Vygotsky’s framework). The subjects are individuals or subgroups engaged in an activity. The object is the raw material on which the subject brings to bear various tools (e.g., the object of study). What is important to understand is that the object is more than just raw stimuli: it is a “culturally formed object with a history, however short or long” (Russell 2002, 69). In any activity system, the motive is linked to the “object” as it shapes the outcome of the activity’s overall. Tools, both material (e.g., a computer) and/or psychological (Cole 1996) (e.g., a concept), are understood as things that mediate subjects’ action upon objects (i.e., they mediate or facilitate subjects doing things). Russell argues that learning in an activity theory framework is not about the internalization of discrete information or even skills by individuals; it is “expanding involvement over time,” social as well as intellectual, with other people and the tools available in their culture.

For the second generation, Engeström expands the framework to examine systems of activity at the macro level. The importance of this shift is that it foregrounds interrelations between the individual subject and his/her community of which he/she was a member. The elements of the activity system are expanded to include the community, a look at division of labor or how tasks get done, and the rules or norms that govern the activity.

The community is the broader or larger group interacting in the activity and of which the subject/s is a part. The division of labor refers to the fact that in any activity there are always power relations and different roles are evident, often causing contradictions in the system. The rules operating in any activity are broadly understood as not only formal and explicit rules governing behavior but, also those that are “unwritten and tacit,” often referred to as norms, routines, habits, values and conventions (Russell 2002; Engeström 1999a).

The “third generation activity theory” looks at interactions between two activity systems. The activity theory is aimed at providing tools and concepts that can enable the exploration of multiple viewpoints, value systems and “networks of interacting activity systems” (Daniels 2001, 91; emphasis added) where contradictions highlighted by contested activity system objects emerge. As such, it focuses on tensions and contradictions that emerge when working not only within but across activity systems.

Third generation activity theory has been important in studies on workplace learning and vocational education and training — especially in looking at transfer and movement between school and work. Many researchers have used the theory to focus on contradictions and tensions in activity systems and have then designed interventions aimed at resolving the tensions (e.g., changes in organizational forms). In a similar way, a service learning partnership can also be understood as an activity system at the intersection of the university and the community.

Activity theory is thus a useful extension on Vygotsky's work as the theory brings history and power into the picture when we try and understand complex activities and social relations. It also provides a link between micro and macro perspectives and contexts. What is important in using activity theory is to analyze the relationships between the elements in a system as these relationships, tensions, and contradictions can tell us a lot about how such a system operates, as well as how to change it. Because these theories have great potential in analyzing the work in the “boundary zone” (Gibbons 2005), they are important in shaping our understanding of partnership work and issues of identity, particularly for the faculty members involved. Indeed, Wenger (1998) has developed a language to talk about work at the boundaries, and through this, he introduces three very useful terms — boundary encounters, boundary objects/artifacts, and brokers (I prefer the term of boundary worker to Wenger's “broker” as work implies activity and has less emphasis on a commercial function, that is “financial broker,” “insurance broker,” and so on).

- Boundary encounters: meetings, visits, conversations across communities of practice, and between two different ones
- Boundary objects and artifacts: the tools (material or psychological) that are used to mediate and negotiate across different communities of practice (e.g., research questionnaires, student projects, and assignments).
- Brokers or boundary workers: the key agents who make the negotiation and mediation across communities possible because of their multi-membership or at least legitimacy across communities.

Through this, they are able to introduce elements of one practice into another. They are thus able to make connections across communities of practice; they are able to “enable and co-ordinate” — and if they are skilled or experienced, Wenger argues that they can open up possibilities for meaning and therefore learning.

Such a role and process is complex, however, and involves key processes of translation, co-ordination, and alignment of perspectives. Successful enactment of these roles requires enough legitimization on both sides of the boundary to influence the development of a practice, to mobilize attention, and to address conflicting interests — in other words, to assist with learning by introducing elements of one community of practice into another. Because they need to address often conflicting interests of more than one community of practice, boundary workers need to carefully manage the “co-existence of membership and non-membership” of boundary practices (Wenger 1998, 110). In this sense, boundary workers are potentially both in and out

of the practice simultaneously. Because of this, they can feel individually inadequate in their roles and lacking credibility and power.

The literature just summarized provides provocative ideas for understanding the nature of the challenges that are endemic to community-university partnerships. Boundary work may well be at the core of these challenges and opportunities. In the remainder of the paper, we suggest how this boundary worker analysis might be applied to understanding central dilemmas faced by faculty who engage in community-university partnership. We take two very different but highly successful cases of service learning partnerships, both from the University of Cape Town, and carry out a close analysis of the kinds of challenges faced by the boundary worker faculty members who facilitated these partnerships. As we shall see, this analysis has value in helping in the understanding of these very different instances of community-university service learning partnership activities.

## **Overall Features of the Service Learning Partnership Cases**

**Case 1: Community-based education in the health sciences.** The fourth-year MBChB Primary Health Care/Public Health community-based block is a compulsory block offered by the School of Public Health and Family Medicine within the Faculty of Health Sciences at UCT. This “block” is a required part of the degree students take when qualifying as medical doctors in South Africa. The MBChB is a six-year undergraduate degree that includes a seventh year of internship in order to qualify for licensure. The community-based block comprises eight weeks in which students are on site in the community for three to four days per week supervised by their site facilitator, Anna (the key boundary worker I focused on at this site). The block integrates teaching in Primary Health Care (PHC), Public Health (PH), and Family Medicine. The PH section teaches the students about how to study the health of populations through conducting epidemiological research and requires them to employ quantitative methods of biostatistics. Students conduct research, summarize their findings, and then present these findings on campus to their epidemiological supervisors, other staff in the departments and fellow students, as well as to members of the community they are in partnership with. Based on the findings the students then plan, design, and implement a health promotion project with their community partners, the PHC part of the block.

What does this partnership look like? In the particular project students were engaged in a partnership with the South African Domestic Servants and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU). The project with SADSAWU, which focused on the physical tasks and accompanying emotional stress and challenges, that impact the health and safety of workers in private homes. The project of the medical students was to research and make visible this work. Based on their findings, the medical students then initiated a workshop on occupational health and safety as a health promotion strategy in the PHC section of the block and also produced a brochure on occupational health and safety issues.

**Case 2: Field-based research in human geography.** The second case study was quite different from the first in content and focus and involved third year human geography students in a research and mapping project carried out in collaboration with a community-based organization in Valhalla Park, a neighborhood of Cape Town, the Valhalla Park United Civic Front organization (VPUCF). This course is a second semester, third year elective in the Department of Environmental and Geographical Sciences, Faculty of Science. The course is intended to explain how a daily functioning urban system is structured and how it works, with particular attention devoted to circumstances of the South African city.

Together with classroom lectures, there were field-based research sessions. The field research convener, Susan (the key boundary worker at this site), negotiates research projects with community-based organizations. These projects fulfilled needs identified by the community, and in the process, students learned field research skills (interviewing and mapping) and gained first-hand experience of problems related to urban geography. The project in this case involved collecting both qualitative and quantitative data on the lives of people living in backyard shacks in Valhalla Park. The term “backyard shack” is one of many (e.g., bungalow, Wendy house) used to describe the houses erected in the yards behind the more formal houses in a community like this. This is a widespread practice in South Africa where there are still massive housing shortages and can be seen in many communities. (The relationships between the house owners and backyard shack dwellers are complex and beyond the scope of this thesis.) The students went on four site visits where they worked with the VPUCF. This service work was aimed at collecting data in order for the Civic Guide to negotiate with the City of Cape Town for better housing. Each team had access to a community activist/facilitator or Civic Guide who explained the purpose of the survey to homeowners and requested of them that they take part. The students also conducted life history interviews with community residents which were then used by the VPUCF to support the quantitative data.

## **The Application of a Boundary Worker Analysis to these Cases**

**MBChB case: Anna as activist educator.** At the end of the first meeting with the domestic workers, Anna summarized by saying “we need to build together our understanding of what is going to happen. We might even offend each other along the way because we don’t fully understand each other’s worlds, i.e., what’s valued in different places, academically and in organizations’ (Field notes 5 October 2004).

Anna as the MBChB Site Facilitator played an important role as a boundary worker. She negotiated the project and her role proved significant not only given her base at the university but also due to the fact that she has a background in facilitation. The Site Facilitator role in the Health Sciences has historically been a complex one (see Cooper 2001 for further discussion). For a number of years there have been struggles over their location, their conditions of service, their status (whether these academic or non-

academic posts) as well as the criteria for their appointment. What is not disputed is the complexity of the work they do. Anna describes her role as in the following way:

[We] have to be better interpreters in order to negotiate ... the expectation is that facilitators need to be adequately skilled to address all of those shifts in spaces and discourses and all the interpretations that need to be happening. We need to be up-dated with the debates in how you need to understand what epidemiological research requires of the student. You need to be able to speak in the epidemiological environment and the community environment. You need to understand project planning and how to guide students through the project planning. You need to be able to function and interpret information across different learning approaches. Before you secure the project you need to speak about sample size, people accessing it and numbers and all of those things. You need to know what it means for the project if you do or don't secure certain things, and you won't unless you have a little bit of an understanding of research methodology (Anna, interview 09.11.04; emphasis added).

Anna's response reveals some of the ways in which Site Facilitators need knowledge of both university and community contexts in order to translate or broker (Wenger 1998) across the boundary zone. Site Facilitators need scientific, medical and epidemiological knowledge as well as community knowledge and experience. There is an enormous competence evident in Anna's discourse as she shows that she understands two very different worlds and how to work within this nexus. It is these roles and kinds of expertise that, while specific to the MBChB course on one level, could also indicate more broadly the kinds of knowledge and expertise boundary workers need to move across and between two very different contexts.

Despite the importance of their work however, they are not recognized in the same way as other faculty involved in the course (e.g., epidemiology supervisors, and none of the Site Facilitators have academic posts). They are perceived as being community-based and as having a knowledge base that is less formal and scientific than that of their epidemiology peers. In academia, disciplinary knowledge is valued highly. The Epidemiology Supervisors bring to their roles the disciplinary knowledge and formal qualifications in the field of public health that Anna lacks; while Anna organizes the fieldwork, the Supervisors get to assess the final epidemiology projects; they are thus what might be termed an "invisible but present" authority throughout the block. As university educators, they are positioned very differently in relation to the higher education-community boundary than are the Site Facilitators. This positioning makes it possible to see how "socially powerful, cultural discourses and practices . . . position people and provide them with resources" (Holland et al. 1998, 32; Holland and Lave, 2001). This also makes visible Roth et al.'s (2004) the claim that identity is much more than 'embodied thoughts, actions and histories'; making sense of identities is also to make sense of and understand the factors that both enable, as well as constrain, agency (of boundary workers) in particular contexts. The authority the Epidemiological supervisors have therefore further weakens Anna's position at the University.

The role of Site Facilitator as a translator also includes the roles of educator and activist. However, Education as such is not really something that a lot of academics are trained in. They are specialists in the area but they have never really had training as educators whereas it seems like all the site facilitators have adult education training. The community perceives me as a representative of the university. In the university I get a sense, and I don't know how right I am, that the site facilitators are very much considered community/field workers (Anna, interview 09.11.04).

Given, therefore, that educator skills are not always valued in the university, Anna argues that this skill and knowledge does not give her the same degree of power and credibility that discipline knowledge gives to discipline-based academics on the university side of the boundary: In terms of the identity of activist, Anna argues that while she herself does not have an activist background she shares that identity with the other site facilitators through the similar work that they do:

If there is anything that the site facilitators have in common as well is the valuing of the activist role as a [Site] [F]acilitator. What is really valuable and exciting for us is when the students become health activists in the process and where that is their major learning that they understand they can play a role as a health activist. They are not just there to heal people through their practical skills in a curative sense but they can actually engage communities and they can engage processes to change health on a broader level. They can engage with communities in a way that empowers both themselves and the group that they are working with to actually make a change around health for themselves and get an understanding of how to do that and how that works (Anna, interview 09.11.04).

Anna and the other site facilitators place high value on this activist role and transforming the students into activists is therefore something that Anna and her colleagues see as one of their primary tasks. However, Anna is also aware of how potentially disruptive the interface or boundary zone can be for the students and so she takes it upon herself to protect and care for the students. The curriculum in the medical degree does not always support an activist learner (i.e., certain kinds of knowledge have value over others):

Different students will take on different values or not within that discourse and change their discourse accordingly or not, depending on how possible it is for them to be a flexible learner, or how secure they can be in that identity. If they can't be, they will sift it out all the time so they can stay focused, otherwise they become too lost and at sea. I sometimes caution myself [that] you can't change them into activists because it is damaging to do something like that when they have to go into the next block and be the kind of learner that they have to be in the rest of the curriculum, a kind of learner that has to accept that they are experts and that you don't question certain things (Anna, interview 09.11.04).

Lastly, together with the challenges brought about by these multiple and complex roles, there is also the challenge created by the fact that their work is linked to a community base. Alperstein (Cooper 2001, 1) argues that this base is crucial to doing this work. Site Facilitators have

had equivalent experience and training [to other lecturers], but not necessarily a degree or diploma ... however most importantly, they [are] integrally involved in or live in the specific community chosen. They [are] well informed of community dynamics ... involved in community structures and ... able to operate effectively as the liaison person between the university and the community. This appears to be a crucial requirement for sustainability of site development.

However, this dual base is complicated as a community base and knowledge clashes with the university base as we discussed earlier. Another MBChB site facilitator put it like this:

Most of the time the community see[s] us as people who can help them ... My neighbors saw me with the students or associated me with the clinic. Yes. The people I stay with look at me for answers. They see me as a resource person. [However], I am not always a member of that community because it depends on where I am working (Margie, interview 01.10.04).

In the partnership, pressure is thus felt from both the university and the community. From the preceding, we can see following Wenger (1998) that Anna, as a site facilitator, does not have the same amount of legitimating on both sides of the university-community boundary. This reduces her influence in shaping the practices of the students and, perhaps more importantly, on the curriculum. There is a sense, therefore, that because she does not have university authority and credibility, her role as translator, and ultimately as boundary worker, is weakened. This is an important consideration in terms of the long-term potential of this site for transforming university educational practices.

**EGS case: Susan as activist academic.** Susan then explained about fieldwork research. She said that many people had a different goal for it: "Mine is that everyone has a good experience but you need to switch around roles in your groups so think about a division of labor. Also, don't think that you can't speak to people about other stuff as you are visiting their house. It is important to introduce yourself 'I am a student and I am learning how to do field research'". Susan indicated that the VPUCF Guides will give them the more detailed, specific information, this "keeps the task realistic and puts the Valhalla Park Civic upfront in the project" (Field notes EGS class session 26 July 2005).

The case of Susan is different from Anna's. Unlike Anna, who in some ways plays a more directly facilitating role in the activities, even nurturing the students at times, Susan plays more of an observer role once the EGS students are out in the field. She

allows the VPUCF members to guide the students and advise them. However, she is also very present: she knows both the community and the university and so is able to be both a strong and credible presence in the community.

Susan is a relatively young but well-respected academic. Her involvement with the VPUCF is very intentional and is linked to her long experience in both activism and academe. As we have seen from the previous quote, she shows her familiarity with the community context in many different ways, e.g. providing feedback on student journals and presentations and helping them to gain insight into the community in new ways, and in her use of code-switching at the first meeting.

In Susan's writings about her teaching philosophy (see the following), she has chosen to foreground her activist-oriented teaching in her application. This is not common practice in a research-intensive institution like UCT:

Helping students develop such [field-based research] skills and dedication ... is crucial in our South African and southern developmental context. In order to achieve these objectives, I prioritise working in teams, not only with other lecturers in my department, but also with community-based organizations and activists outside the university, through mutually beneficial projects with my undergraduate courses and post-graduate student thesis work (Teaching Philosophy Statement 2003, 1).

In terms of her community-university partnership work, a critical part of her role is making students aware that communities have all sorts of knowledge and that knowledge is everywhere . . . “knowledge is not [just] something that’s found up here . . . this is very important value. So [while] it’s the experience of the students and the skills of the students, it’s [also about] knowledge of situations in all sorts of places and which is articulated in lots of different ways” (Susan, interview 15.10.05).

Field-based research plays an important role in helping students understand some of the theoretical constructs they encounter in this partnership work. In reflecting on how she understands her own teaching role, she believes in trying “to build a commitment to my discipline (geography) and to precise social science” (Teaching Philosophy Statement 2003, 1). In addition, her own teaching practice and identity is enhanced through working and learning in teams, and working and learning with off-campus communities. She argues that her engagement and relationships with these communities not only inform her research but serve to sustain relationships critical to her practice and by so doing help to construct what she terms “robust urban knowledge”:

The questions and commitments that underpin my research are thus not only academic, but also social and political, focused on the content of what we teach and how we create in our students engaged and rigorous researchers. Underlying these interests, however, is a political commitment that as researchers we engage with and contribute to those with whom and on whom we do research; in my case, social movements and community activists

struggling in poverty ... [T]he academic work we produce grows and is sustained and nurtured within these 'other' processes, building on the relationships that they generate (Oldfield 2007, 23).

Susan's students also perceive her as having the experience to deal with this course and they value her insight:

She is not just being an academic; she is really going out there and dealing with communities that are struggling and making them feel a lot better and giving them a lot more hope and drawing them into her life and not just making them feel that they are a part of her life (student D1, interview 19.01.06).

Through both her teaching and her research therefore, Susan has shown the degree to which she has agency as an academic and as a boundary worker and that this agency is not diminished by engaging with communities; working like this in fact enhances her agency. She is powerfully positioned on both sides of the boundary, reflecting opportunities for agency, authority and credibility. As a result of this her role and authority as a boundary worker in the context of service learning is substantially enhanced.

In sum, through the lens of boundary work, we can begin to see community-university partnerships as boundary work and the role of educators as 'boundary workers.' This work is challenging, demanding and often contradictory. Success in the role depends on the degree of formal recognition and status within the academy and in the community, as well as the knowledge base from which educators operate. The potential for educators to be boundary workers thus lies in whether they have credibility on both sides of the boundary. If credibility is in question or even diminished on either side then some of the transformative potential of this role is diminished.

In taking this work forward, it is important therefore to ask some additional questions:

- What are the challenges in playing the boundary worker role?
- What are the knowledge, values, attitudes, and authority required to play this role of boundary worker successfully — in particular contexts?
- How can we support them in playing this role?

The answers to these questions are important because understanding the roles and tensions experienced by higher education educators can go a long way to understanding some of the inherent tensions but also possibilities, for community-university partnerships. By drawing on activity theory, this paper has provided a way into understanding complex partnership practices. By focusing on the role of faculty in the partnership, we can find ways of both valuing the knowledge and experience of faculty but also of providing the necessary support for faculty when they experience conflicts, tension and lack of credibility in this work. This is an overdue area of community-university and can ultimately enhance our understanding of service learning partnership work.

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