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Reciprocity in the Practice of Publicly Engaged Scholarship: Reflections from a  
Transnational Literacy Project

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**Abstract**

In this article, the authors examine the concept of “reciprocity” in publicly engaged literacy scholarship. The idea of reciprocity suggests that projects using a publicly engaged research model should comprise two-way partnerships that strive to balance benefits to the researcher and to community partners. The authors (a researcher and a community partner) explore this dynamic by considering their own experiences working on projects with groups of youth in Honduras and in the United States. The groups shared their cultures and experiences through writing and technology, and challenged ideas about security and public space. Given the national, racial, cultural, economic, linguistic, and power dynamics inherent in these publicly engaged scholarship projects, reciprocity was a theme to which the authors paid close attention and about which they were in constant discussion. The authors address a series of questions about reciprocity and scholarship, and find that through their experiences they have learned to define both concepts in ways that are not traditionally measurable and cannot be mapped out as directional.

*Keywords:* Honduras, publicly engaged scholarship

Publicly engaged scholarship in literacy education offers educators the opportunity to apply evidence-based practices in schools, share unique expertise with communities outside the university setting, and learn by direct, sustained participation in local, national, and global projects. For community groups and individuals, partnerships with those who teach and study in the university setting offer a chance for community members to shape agendas with the institutional support of a university and its highly educated and often well-connected faculty, share social contexts with researchers, and bring teachers and learners together across disciplines, ideologies, and geographies for a common social good.

However, the potential for both sides to pursue a common social good through publicly engaged scholarship presents complexities and complications. Beyond the need for individuals and groups to work through power dynamics, terms of leadership, and collective definitions of both who has what expertise and desired outcomes, faculty and staff at higher education institutions are regularly faced with decisions regarding the utility of allocating resources and assessing the outcomes of publicly engaged scholarship (Fitzgerald, Bruns, Sonka, Furco, & Swanson, 2012). Communities, too, must decide how to best achieve their own distinctive goals, who should be allowed into their community spaces, and where to apply their sources of funding. Vigorous contemporary discussions about publicly engaged scholarship highlight the opportunities and challenges of this work, justify its continued relevance, and increase its significance in both university and community settings (Bloomgarden, 2013; Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Haft, 2015; Pike, Bringle, & Hatcher, 2014; Reardon, 2006).

### **Defining Publicly Engaged Scholarship**

Indicative of this robust discussion and coupled with a swiftly changing landscape in higher education, there is no unified and static definition of publicly engaged scholarship. For the purposes of this article, we draw on a range of definitions of publicly engaged scholarship that exist across institutions and publications.

Imaging America is a national organization in the United States that provides leadership, fosters intellectual dialogue, and offers creative spaces for scholars and community members interested in the publicly engaged scholarship research model. The organization defines publicly engaged scholarship as a “scholarly or creative activity integral to a faculty member’s academic area” and

suggests that it contributes ideally “to the public good and yields artifacts of public and intellectual value” (Ellison & Eatman, 2008, p. 6).

Barge and Shockley-Zalabak (2008) proposed that publicly engaged scholarship represents an opportunity to make research relevant in communities outside the university and linked theoretical work with on-the-ground practice. In this way, academic research is informed by more than theory. Publicly engaged research depends on its applicability in neighborhoods and schools, and with groups and organizations as they live everyday lives. In turn, their daily lives influence the research academic’s approach and conduct.

Finally, Bringle and Hatcher (2011) identified four tenets present in most current definitions of publicly engaged scholarship. First, publicly engaged scholarship should be scholarly. In a scholarly project, the university and community are brought together, and from their resulting partnership, scholarship-focused and evidence-based practice is shared with academic and community audiences. Second, the scholarship should cut across research, teaching, and service without compartmentalizing these aspects of a faculty member’s or community member’s job or role. Third, publicly engaged scholarship should reflect the values of a civil democracy. The subject of this article—reciprocity—is what Fitzgerald and colleagues (2012) outlined in their fourth tenet of publicly engaged scholarship when they stated that publicly engaged scholarship should be “reciprocal and mutually beneficial” (adapted from Fitzgerald et al., 2012, p.13).

In this article, we—Kate E. Kedley, a literacy educator from the United States, and Héctor Efrén Flores Asiego, an educator and activist from Honduras—contribute to current conversations around defining the key concept of reciprocity in publicly engaged scholarship. We discuss critically the tensions we work through in our efforts to make our publicly engaged scholarship projects reciprocal by striving to ensure that all parties involved benefit in ways that are important to them, and that those benefits stem from the maximization of support and participation from all parties.

Furthermore, we challenge prevailing definitions of *community* in publicly engaged scholarship, when community is often considered in terms of the “local” and within the geographical area of the university itself (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Haft 2012; Reardon, 2006). Instead, we suggest that universities in the United States can make a global community relevant. International publicly engaged

scholarship projects must make visible the transnational relationships and connections inherent in a U.S. university setting. To illustrate, at Kate's graduate school location, discussions and debates took place around the university's clothing contracts for uniforms and fan gear, and their production in exploitative sweatshops in Honduras and elsewhere (Poe, 2010), at the same time that immigration from Central America and Honduras to the university's local community was becoming increasingly relevant (Hsu, 2008). Though there are many other global issues that affect students in the United States, most students are otherwise unaware of them because of the invisibility of these global relationships. As publicly engaged scholars, we challenge the idea that a publicly engaged scholarship research model should be primarily about reciprocity with local communities that are geographically near universities themselves.

Reciprocity is a challenge to describe and achieve, and this article emerges directly from this challenge. Nevertheless, reciprocity in publicly engaged scholarship is generally defined as scholarship that is collaborative, cooperative, and multi-directional, and that strives perpetually to balance the benefits for the researcher(s), the community, and community partners. The story we tell in this article is part of our sustained effort to aspire to the four criteria described earlier—especially that of reciprocity—as we frame our work together as publicly engaged scholarship.

### **The Authors: Community Partner and University Partner**

We are both educators and researchers, albeit in very different settings. Héctor is a lawyer, activist, poet, and educator from El Progreso, Honduras, and works at a Jesuit organization whose mission is to contribute to a more just and equitable society through popular education. Héctor's position within the institution focuses on public relationships and promoting awareness with other institutions. Héctor was born in Olancho, Honduras, and grew up in the coastal city of Tocoa, Colón, Honduras. Héctor's interest in collaborating with Kate stems from a desire to work with a colleague from the progressive North American sector who is familiar with both Honduras and the United States, and who challenges the status quo of such transnational relationships.

Kate is a one-time secondary language arts teacher and a trained academic working in a tenure-track position at a university in the United States. Introduced to the idea of publicly engaged scholarship through a multi-disciplinary graduate

student institute while completing a PhD, Kate tries to frame research using this model. Kate grew up in the United States in a teaching family and a rural farming community, and lived, taught, and conducted research in Honduras for four years. Kate's interest in working with Héctor is to attempt to frame academic inquiry as publicly engaged while continually working through critical aspects of the research model such as power and reciprocity.

Kate conducted doctoral dissertation research in Honduras in 2015, working with North American and Honduran teachers to explore the hidden curriculum (Freire, 1993) of English-language and bilingual (i.e., Spanish-English) education in Honduras. While in the field, Kate sought information and support from Héctor's office at the Jesuit educational institution. Through initial conversations about the dissertation topic, then later conversations more closely related to our individual lives and work, and because we communicated clearly and had similar goals and intentions, we decided to collaborate on two small projects in which Héctor was already participating. Kate's existing familiarity with Honduras, the language, and the Honduran educational system facilitated this partnership.

After a year of collaborating, meeting, conferencing, and planning, Héctor visited the United States three times in an effort to enhance our community and university impact, and to share our experiences and learn from others. Together we spoke on three university campuses, in churches, in secondary classrooms, to community groups, and on public radio, and sat on panels. Throughout this process, projects have stalled and grown, evolved and changed, and we have found new ways to think about our relationship, reciprocity, and assessment as collaborators and partners.

Our teaching and research missions are linked indistinguishably to service, and we would be hard-pressed to establish where any of the projects end and the others begin. The co-authoring of this article exemplifies how we strive for maximum representation as we critically work through notions of civil democracy in our projects. Applicable to this discussion, we seek perpetually to ensure that our projects are reciprocal and mutually beneficial, even in the varied ways we have come to define those terms.

### **The Projects Described**

Although our partnership has taken many different forms, there are two projects which grew spontaneously out of our personal and institutional

connections, and in which we have been involved consistently since we started our collaboration. For the purposes of this article, we share these two projects which, relatively early in our partnership, are the most developed and strive to meet current definitions of publicly engaged scholarship, and yet in some ways diverge from current definitions. As readers will see in the descriptions that follow, our roles shift and change depending on the project and its needs at a given time.

### **Project 1: Transnational Literacy Project**

Héctor is a co-founder of a collective of local (Honduran) artists whose goal is to reclaim public space from widespread violence in the Central American country of Honduras. On evenings, members of the collective gather at the central park of their city and “reclaim” the street corner, which is otherwise seen as too dangerous to socialize in and is often subject to police surveillance. For those few hours, the members of the collective plug in speakers, pull out guitars, prepare poetry and prose, and gather the community. The space is momentarily filled with poetry, music, and other expressions of creative arts. Kate’s role in this project was initially limited to learning and negotiating the basics of the project, participating in the creative culture the collective seeks to grow, and finding ways to support the project without overtaking it or changing elements fundamental to the collective. Kate’s unique literacy expertise and connection to literacy circles in the United States has given this project an extended platform in two countries.

### **Project 2: Indigenous Book Distribution and Translation**

The second project builds on Héctor’s relationship with an indigenous community in a fairly isolated area of Honduras. First, we began an active book collection to start a small library for the children in the community, where local (Honduran) artists and writers hold book drives and then later deliver the books to the indigenous community and share literacy activities with them. Additionally, work has begun on translating several books from Spanish to the community’s indigenous language. Because authorities often claim that the indigenous language only exists in a traditional and simple sense, it is important to produce texts and other materials in the community’s own language so as to lend their culture and language greater visibility nationwide.

### **Complicating Reciprocity in a Transnational Literacy Partnership**

These two projects make transnational connections between an artist collective, youth in two countries, and indigenous communities in Honduras, linked



by literature, technology, creativity, and travel. We imagine that youth in the United States are able to receive honest insight into the art, culture, and politics of Honduras, and that these projects challenge their understandings of “public space,” “security,” “art,” and “literacy.” The youth and communities in Honduras have an international outlet to share stories and build a network of solidarity in other countries in order to jointly promote our shared interests and agendas.

Given the national, racial, cultural, economic, and linguistic dynamics inherent in these projects, reciprocity is a theme to which we have given close attention and which we discuss constantly. There are obvious (albeit not necessarily material) benefits for Kate personally and professionally in participating in the projects; Kate has been allowed access to a space that many North Americans and researchers would not be afforded. Kate learned extensive research and investigative skills through critique, trial and error, and accomplishment, and this partnership informed Kate’s research agenda (including dissertation fieldwork) and teaching. In sum, the projects themselves, particularly in working in partnership with Héctor, have given Kate significant cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) at Kate’s university, in the United States, and in Honduras. Kate has been invited to sit on panels and share information about the projects across campus and has made professional connections across two nations based on this work. On many levels, Kate’s connection to Héctor and these projects offers Kate credibility in Honduras that Kate might otherwise not have been able to gain. Kate’s university and local community benefitted from a series of well-attended speaking events and forums during which we both engaged with other academics and students in conversations about publicly engaged scholarship and the projects themselves. Kate has an extensive background in the teaching of language arts, reading, writing, and literacy, and extensive knowledge about evidence-based educational practice and its application with youth and texts.

This article uses both of our voices—the educator and activist, Héctor, and the university researcher and teacher, Kate—to explore the ongoing redefining of reciprocity in publicly engaged scholarship. Taking into account our own experiences in this process, we respond to a series of questions about our process of reciprocity and share some of the lessons learned regarding scholarship and reciprocity. We wrote the questions together, specifically addressing the topic of reciprocity in our evolving and growing relationship with each other and with the projects. We answered each question separately, then we read and discussed each

other's answers. Finally, we engaged in multiple conversations to clarify our unique positions, worked through contradictions, and decided how to best present our perspectives in the space of this article. Héctor responded in Spanish, and Kate translated the text to English; errors in translation are solely the responsibility of Kate.

## **Reflections on Reciprocity from a Transnational Literacy Project**

### **How did the ideas for these projects come about?**

*Héctor:* Kate came to my office to discuss a study about education in Honduras. From there, we began talking about art and how art is an integral part of these educational processes. But Honduran education lacks quality and is generally not relevant in its response to the demands and desires of the communities themselves.

After the initial introductions and discussions, we thought about how to give an artistic project enough support so it could serve as a larger generator of social consciousness. We hoped it could further the collective's goal of reclaiming public spaces from violence and build a co-existence that is a source of energy, a culture of peace, and includes respect for the rights of others. The result was that our thoughts have been shared in different arenas and in different spaces, and we look for ways to work across international borders with the support of technology.

On our journey, we have been writing down and throwing out ideas, not because some were bad and others were good, but because we realized that contexts changed, sometimes quite rapidly. It is necessary to move with the changing contexts until we have done what is necessary to make the project viable and sustainable in its objectives and in our current place within the process.

*Kate:* I try to be open to what people in my research site ask of me because hundreds of educators, teachers, and community members led me to participants, offered information, and continue to give significant support for my larger research agenda. Some of the requests were very clearly small professional and personal favors, such as translating a document or editing English signs for a museum project. Others requests generated engagement with students, teachers, and schools: guest speaking for a university class, advising a bilingual program, or supervising a field trip. These occasions were mutually beneficial, democratic in simple terms, and involved my research, my participants' teaching, and service between the two, meeting three of the four tenets of publicly-engaged scholarship (Bringle &

Hatcher, 2011). However, there was no explicit conversation about reciprocity and no plan for scholarly potential.

From the onset, we envisioned working together on projects stemming from Héctor's work in the community that could also be supported by my position in the university and my knowledge set. We brainstormed how we could meet the definition for "scholarly." In the first months, Héctor extended invitations of community activities to me, and I learned about the goals and context of these activities before actively participating. We shared educational, cultural, and political philosophies. The idea for a transnational literacy, writing, art, and cultural project was ambitious, and we remain in constant dialogue about how to further the project. The same holds for the translation of texts for the community's indigenous language and the book drives.

**What goals have been accomplished, and what has worked to achieve them?**

*Héctor:* I sense that successes should be defined not just in goals accomplished but in new opportunities that have been created. Certainly, with the steps we have taken, there have been many new opportunities. This is to say that, given the complexities of the language barrier, the geographical borders, and the distance between us, we have already accomplished enough that is more than adequate to celebrate.

My goal of participating, during several days, in distinct spaces in universities and high schools in Iowa—where we shared the reality of Honduras, the impact of violence there, and the high levels of corruption and impunity of the country's governing leaders ... and beyond that the persecution and death of people who work on defending human rights—achieved another goal, that of educating the North Americans, which is the best proof that our effort is worthwhile. Now many North Americans are conscious of what is happening in Honduras, and they are able to listen, comment, suggest, and even act (even within their own small spaces) with their government representatives regarding their country's international relationships.

We articulate and propose poetry readings and artistic performances in the streets of the city that we hope, as a vision of this project, can be shared with individuals and institutions, such as organizations, universities, and schools, in Iowa. As a start, we have begun to achieve this virtually, through social media, live video feeds, chat and messaging services, and blogs.

I think that achievements have been made possible thanks to our strong intention and our commitment to dialogue. We have a capacity to operationalize our decisions, and for sure we have had the willingness of people to participate without expecting anything in return. This includes people who participate without the expectation of financial compensation for their efforts.

*Kate:* I initially thought my particular benefit would come from producing traditional academic works, but my understanding of the definition of “scholarship” and what my benefit is here has evolved in a different direction. For example, “a scholarship model” of public engagement includes the “spread of scholarship-focused, evidence-based practices in communities” while bringing universities and communities together (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011). I know that traditional academic scholarship is not an objective of the community. I learned that for a “scholarship model” to exist, I must understand that traditional scholarship is unique to my role, rather than a larger goal of the project. The opportunity to produce traditional scholarship (e.g., a formal investigation or a peer-reviewed article) currently takes a backseat to the needs of the project and its members.

What I now envision as mutually beneficial, an outcome of reciprocity, manifests itself differently. Organizing a multi-week trip to the United States and scheduling meetings with legislators, students, community members, and social justice groups, gave us opportunities to share with the university community and engage in dialogue about our conception of the project. By setting and accomplishing these small but significant goals, along with cooperation and patience, we continue to redefine what we need and want reciprocity to look like.

**How do you accomplish the unique needs of your group, and how do you make the project reciprocal?**

*Héctor:* Two emergent needs in our effort cannot be ignored and cannot be understood separately, one without the other. The first has to do with the need to enter this partnership without expecting and hoping for individual recognition, and the other has to do with financial sustainability.

The first prompts us to think profoundly about service opportunities rather than individual interests. What matters most is that we work with people and their contexts, and not simply think about who does what and where they do it. What is important is the good work that is done, and not who does it. As allies or partners in this project, what is important is the project itself, not who will lead or take credit

for the leadership. Another obligation of a proposal like this is that it rises above both institutional egos and personal egos. We want our projects to be collective, not of one or two people. They will be of communities, with communities, and for communities—the indigenous community, the Honduran youth, the marginalized and displaced, and those who do not have access to basic texts and language materials. This is the plan, and this is the faith we are putting in it.

The second need relates to financial need and a commitment to financial sustainability. While we have insisted strongly that what is important with this project is neither economic nor financial, there are parts that need money and economic resources in order to make them possible. For example, for singing and music, sound systems are needed, and to read poetry, we need books filled with poetry, and for both of these things to be possible, we need basic financial resources.

For this reason, we continue looking for contacts, and for this reason, we continue looking for partners, and for this reason, we continue thinking of allies—we do not want to sell our art, and we do not want to make this an art project based on exclusivity. But we do want to make the project public—as public as possible—so it can be for everyone. For these reasons, while we think about who can contribute and support this project, we will not sell out on our word, nor will we sell our dignity or the power to speak freely.

*Kate:* I represent the university community, and I represent myself as a scholar in this transnational relationship. However, I have worked hard to make sure that my primary commitment is not directed back to the university or to myself, but instead is spread equitably among multiple communities in this relationship: the indigenous communities in Honduras, the youth in Honduras and the United States, my classrooms in the university, etc. Justifying the importance of an artistic project in Honduras to university communities in the United States is always an art in and of itself. Finding and highlighting reasons why this project’s importance resides not only in Honduras but also in Iowa, for Iowans and for the university community, has been a challenge. Even still, working with students and youth in other countries, exploring how literature, poetry, and art work in reclaiming public spaces from violence is something that many at the university and in my community in Iowa take an interest in and support. It is our job—but mine specifically—to negotiate the relationship and defend the project’s importance to ensure continued institutional support. At the beginning stages, this meant logistical support,

specifically by securing a travel visa for Héctor, providing a physical space and advertising for Héctor's presentations and talks, and translating them for audiences in the United States. In the future, as we continue proving the project's value and potential, we seek partners in the university that will provide long-term sustainability that includes logistical and financial support. Ensuring that the relationship maintains reciprocity and demonstrating how the university community benefits are dimensions of my work.

**Why is it important for you to work with partners in academic institutions/the community?**

*Héctor:* Without a doubt, working in close contact with people in indigenous and impoverished communities is the best thing that has happened to me. I am sure that this work needs to continue and should continue to build better opportunities and a true state of human rights that recognizes these communities with dignity. But it is not enough to ease their day, or change their moments, to clear up some of their doubts—it is necessary to work to change society's perceptions of the poor and of indigenous people. Regarding the word *poor*, they are not poor, but they have been impoverished. Furthermore, being indigenous is not a condition, but they are indigenous people who want to live according to their own worldview. Such a commitment is important for the academy to have because of its capacity to produce scientific knowledge, because of its interest in social development, and because of its responsibility to the future of society.

I also absolutely believe that the status or condition of being poor or from an indigenous group does not signify that one is behind in terms of social and technological advances or the natural sciences. On the contrary, we are called to bring academic sciences to those who most need them, to ensure the highest form of development: the institutional recognition of the dignity of the traditionally marginalized, their improved access to education, texts, books, and technology. We are trying to break the paradigm that says that indigenous people or poor and marginalized people do not need or have a right to a modern education.

One thing to always keep in mind is that the biggest flaw in current democratic thinking is its concept of representation. To me, it is important that we do not commit this error by speaking on behalf of a people; instead, we speak with the people, without taking their place.

Communities are not partners, nor are they beneficiaries. Even less are they

subjects. The communities have the final word: They must have a voice—they are the ones that lead, and we, academic partners, who often talk from above, or even from the collective that I represent, are instruments and channels for them—they can bring their requests at the appropriate moment and be given a fair dialogue. We do not want to force solutions on them; instead, we want to build beneficial projects together. However, in their delivery of their voice and requests, we cannot, it seems to me, leave them alone. It is important to accompany them, to be with them, to share with them all our resources that are necessary to prompt change for the better.

*Kate:* For years I was a public school teacher in the area of secondary language arts. Given my experience as a teacher, I already knew when I started graduate school that the walls of a classroom will not contain all of your duties as a teacher and that your workday extends beyond 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., and therefore I am accustomed to working outside the school—with parents, with families, and with the surrounding school neighborhood. Collaborating with local businesses and planning field trips and excursions were parts of my life as a teacher. Picnics for community members on the school campus and working with liaisons for homeless students and other special populations were daily occurrences when I taught in the public secondary school. K-12 schools have not necessarily perfected the art of community engagement, but as a teacher in a public high school, I was certainly encouraged and expected to look for opportunities outside of the classroom, even if we were not compensated financially or recognized beyond our own teaching positions. This is where I first learned about community engagement.

Because of this, working with the community has always been a given in my adult and working life. The difference now is that my position and responsibilities at the university have provided me with new ways of thinking about what I can and should be doing—simply by having more involved practice in the process—and have challenged me to optimize the mutual benefit for all involved by framing the relationship as publicly engaged scholarship.

**How do you and your partner define, discuss, and balance the concept of reciprocity in your projects?**

*Héctor:* We first tried to make clear the primary intentions of the project, and that we are not the primary intention. It is not just about the two of us, we have said, but it is a good faith effort with a sector of Honduran society that needs us to be in solidarity and that asks us to be part of the effort for change. Therefore, we

insist on the idea of a common project, or the possibility of a connection between us that seems feasible and achievable and from which the people in the communities can benefit.

The second part of the discussion was about what we would do and how we would accurately represent the requests of the communities and the people, and not just serve the two of us from our positions of power, with our access to financial, social, and political support. This discussion led us to think about specific actions and agendas. In practice, it has been difficult to always be on the same page as the communities and as each other, but at a minimum we continue to dialogue and think about our proposals.

Most important to me, regarding the matter of reciprocity, is that both of us know that we are only two collaborators in a larger project known as community development. This project does not belong to two people, or to an organization, and it isn't driven by a board of directors. This project is of the societies that inhabit it, linked with organizations that are local, national, and international. It should be seen as a collective construction, with high standards of co-participation, and there should be maximum representation in the planning from all involved. With this understanding, neither my partner nor I have the expectation that we receive something material in return, even though we benefit professionally. On the contrary, we are sure that our primary task is to offer what we have—and what we have is art and a desire to coordinate our efforts with those who wish to share in artistic projects.

*Kate:* We have made reciprocity the center of our discussions. We often ask why we have chosen to do this or that, and for whose benefit. This can be difficult with people you do not know well, or when there are complex elements in a working relationship. For example, I am working in my second language. Héctor has to deal with my misunderstanding of nuances, including cultural misunderstandings. I often lack an ability to explain clearly my own point of view in Spanish. There is occasionally miscommunication about small details of projects and even larger goals, given our different first languages. Our flexibility (and Héctor's capability to be sympathetic to the language barrier) goes a long way in working through challenges. I also rely on Héctor to redirect my misunderstandings.

The biggest intellectual challenge has been in reminding myself that context determines everything. Through our collaboration on this article, I see how different



backgrounds and perspectives shape our understandings of the project and how we define them. For example, at the onset of the development of this article, I thought of myself as the university or academic partner and Héctor as the community partner. However, through our collaboration on the article and the ensuing discussions, I learned that Héctor conceives of himself as an academic partner as well, and Héctor conceives of the indigenous groups and Honduran youth as the community partners. I realized I had made assumptions about our roles and dictated who was to serve those roles. I now conceive of our relationship as not binary (university-community partnership) but multi-directional and multi-faceted, and we fill roles differently depending on time, place, and context.

These discrepancies strengthen our projects and relationship; there is little room to fall back on old habits because we both need to be able to justify our position clearly and repeatedly to each other. We understand that reciprocity and benefit look differently every day for every group. Ideally, the benefits would be multi-directional and constant, but might not always be. The needs of individuals, groups, and projects change, contexts shift, and the conversation and process continues.

**What type of product or result are you looking for throughout the process and in the end?**

*Héctor:* Above all, we want to reclaim public spaces that have been seized from us by violence. We want to reclaim spaces where Hondurans can gather without fear, without having to pay to be there, without taking a risk to gather there. For this, we want to return public spaces to the people to use for community life and social co-existence.

We want to generate opportunities for youth, dignify them, and give them the space that they deserve, not the criminalization that the government of Honduras gives them. Youth in Honduras are frequently charged with crimes for practicing their guaranteed rights of protesting and getting an education—therefore, they are not criminals, but they have been criminalized. We want the youth to feel and be a part of and participate in the social and cultural life of Honduras, not just be mere recipients without the possibility of co-authoring their own development and growth.

Above all, we want to show that we can live in peace. We are not a bad people—the bad are few in number, and the good can change this reality. We look

to return to the roots of our people and make a difference in and for the world. We want peace to be a possibility, and dialogue, generated by shared art and culture, can make this possibility a perpetual reality.

*Kate:* As a publicly engaged scholar from the U.S. working in Honduras, a primary goal is to be in solidarity with the communities I work in and write about. This is complicated, as the teachers I work with are not always aligned with the same political, social, and cultural communities. But I question whether solidarity is an academic product. Another goal is to improve in my role of endorsing solidarity. As an academic, I hope to bring awareness to others about educational issues in Honduras and to justify those issues' relevance and importance to teachers and students in the United States. In terms of our specific project, I support the goals of bringing the art of the spoken and written word (both the opportunity to experience it and the opportunity to create it) to those who have previously been excluded from accessing it. I will use technology and cultural exchanges to share the unique political, social, and cultural realities of Honduras with youth and university communities in the United States. The aforementioned goals cannot be clearly defined as material or academic products, but I do consider achieving these goals to be an important part of our reciprocal relationship. We have learned that our own evolution and assessment tools must be constantly renegotiated, and communication is central to our process.

**What is something you have learned about reciprocity in this process?**

*Héctor:* We have learned that when you want to achieve something and that goal isn't conditioned by greed or limited by individual temperaments, it is possible to accomplish. We have learned that reciprocity is possible. We have learned that in this journey it is possible for all to benefit—both the supposed “receiver” as well as those who “give.” We learned that reciprocity can be more than just a word and that it can turn into a relationship that creates opportunities and change for those who need and desire it.

We have also learned to think of a sociological concept of reciprocity and move beyond defining reciprocity as a financial or material concept. A sociological reciprocity is based on ideas and a collective construction of knowledge. It is also based on a solidarity between people and against a historical subjugation that taught us that the logic of exchange is that whoever provides the money and the resources gets to define the goals and the outcomes of these processes.

*Kate:* The main thing I have learned about reciprocity is to take care and reflect on how I define it. Reciprocity in our context is not static. Today's needs and goals will likely differ from what is needed tomorrow. This project has shown me that reciprocity cannot be easily mapped as a "two-way" benefit, and even calling it multi-directional does not fully capture the concept. Reciprocity is not something easily measurable.

### **Concluding Thoughts: Re-Definitions in a Permanent Process of Public Engagement**

In the process of writing this article together, and over the last two years of working together, we have learned that we must first be open to defining and redefining the term *reciprocity*, as well as the words *communities*, *teaching*, *learning*, and *assessment*. Traditional research model definitions of these terms do not always apply, and we are obligated to define the terms of our own professional relationship and justify how and why it is scholarly. Because our partnership crosses so many cultural, linguistic, economic, educational, social, and national boundaries, the need to redefine the model for our unique relationship has always stood in sharp relief. Even the ways we assess our projects and our performances stand at odds with what is familiar or traditional. Bringle and Hatcher (2002) suggested that the publicly engaged "relationship [must be] evaluated from one's own perspective, but parties also [must] examine what is invested and obtained from the relationship relative to the partner" (p. 509). In that sense, we perpetually rethink our intentions relative to our goals, actions, adjustments, and celebrations.

Second, we have learned that this process is permanent (although the projects themselves might not be). Patience has been integral to this process as we work on defining what scholarly products are and how we justify that classification. For example, we pondered whether a three-week visit from Héctor to Kate's university, which included meetings and presentations to over 700 students, professors, teachers, and community members qualified as scholarly. Kate has been tentative in trying to produce traditional types of scholarship based on this relationship before having a significant role in the process and being sufficiently immersed in the projects. We have brainstormed on how to permanently ensure how this relationship has changed our own teaching and relationships with students, both in terms of material and in terms of pedagogy. Because we are taking a long-term view on this partnership, patience with each other and the process has been imperative.

Finally, we conclude this article with the last question we addressed and discussed for this article. The question asks what advice we would share with others who desire to work in university-community partnerships under the umbrella of publicly engaged scholarship.

*Kate:* During the research project in Honduras, I heard from Honduran community members that there was a significant amount of mistrust directed toward foreign partners in educational projects. Because of this, I have become more humble about my role in Honduras and the expertise I bring to the project. Héctor and his community have this project under control, and there is no need to change the project significantly because of my presence. My role needs to support the goals of many constituents. My advice is to acknowledge that community members are experts in their communities. The university's expertise is only relative to the context.

It is important for individuals in varying disciplines, departments, and groups to articulate the meaning and significance of reciprocity for each context—mutual benefit cannot simply be measured by equal material outcome, and reciprocity should not be limited by others' definitions. Be comfortable with justifying individual definitions of reciprocity that are consistent with the context.

*Héctor:* A non-negotiable condition of publicly engaged scholarship requires that each individual approaching a project with value for reciprocity should be humble and willing to let the communities have a voice in what is being constructed. We want university partners that are capable of setting aside their own needs in favor of the needs of others. We want partners that are capable of seeing the interests of the communities and not just of the individual. Above all, we want partners that have clarity on this point. Furthermore, they must have an understanding that all of us are in a process of learning and that there is absolutely never a moment where one person or group is more knowledgeable than another.

The mission of this project is to provide opportunities for people, not to take them away. It is to provide a space for voices, not to shut them out. It is to serve as a connection between people, not to replace their views. It is to open roads, not to simply leave people waiting. If you do not come with an understanding of these conditions, it is better that you do not come at all—if that is the case, neither you nor your resources are necessary.

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### Author Biographies



Kate E. Kedley is an assistant professor in the Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey. Kate's research interests include public engagement, LGBTQ and young adult literature, language education, and social and educational movements in Honduras. Additionally, Kate extends interests in social movements in Honduras with solidarity work. Previously, as a doctoral student at the University of Iowa, Kate was a 2014 Obermann Fellow and participated in the Graduate Institute on Engagement and the Academy. Kate also served as a steward in the Graduate Student Union and as a member of the Advisory Board for the Women's Resource and Action Center. Kate's secondary teaching experiences include language arts classes at schools in Iowa, Arizona, and Honduras.



Héctor Efrén Flores A. is a lawyer, social activist, educator, and poet in El Progreso, Honduras. Along with five published works of poetry and prose under his pseudonym "Chaco de la Pitoreta," Héctor participated in two large-scale investigations and co-authored studies about gangs, the prison system, and education in Honduras. Héctor is a co-founder of *Atrapados en Azul, HN*, a collective of local artists who bring poetry and music to the streets in order to reclaim public spaces from police brutality and violence. He does solidarity work with Garifuna and Tolupan indigenous people, efforts through which he participates in human rights training and community organization. Professionally, Héctor's works in the areas of popular education and social promotion for the Jesuit educational organization *Fe y Alegría*.