The Farm To Fork project

Community-engaged scholarship from community partners' perspective

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Higher education institutions have traditionally largely ignored their role in addressing the challenges their communities face. However, it is increasingly recognised that higher education institutions can play a role in sustainable social change. Pedagogy in higher education is shifting focus from valuing standardisation and testing to valuing civic and community engagement and active learning (LaMarre & Hunter 2012; Strand 2000). Partnerships between higher education institutions and community organisations can increase the knowledge base available in universities, improve students' learning experiences, support community-based organisations and build civic engagement (Melaville, Berg & Blank 2006; Semken & Freeman 2008; Showalter 2013; Strand 2000). Such partnerships can be powerful tools for providing long-term, sustainable solutions to various issues faced by the community. One form that these partnerships can take is community-engaged scholarship (CES) – a community-engaged approach to teaching, learning and research, which focuses on a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and human and material resources for the purpose of positive social change (Beckman & Hay 2003; Israel et al. 1998; Melaville, Berg & Blank 2006; Roche 2008). CES aims to identify and address a challenge or need in the community using practices such as community-engaged learning, community-based research, environmental education and service learning, or place-based learning.

While CES has been shown to benefit students, professors and higher education institutions (Melaville, Berg & Blank 2006; Semken & Freeman 2008; Showalter 2013; Strand 2000), there is a paucity of literature related to the impacts on community. Hicks (2009) suggests that the focus on expected outcomes for students, faculty and institutions, rather than communities, presents an opportunity for much needed study. Some authors suggest that the shortage of literature addressing CES community impacts is an indicator that CES was developed solely to educate and benefit students, rather than communities (Stoecker 2009). Questions

remain whether CES, in practice, provides benefit to community partners; thus, evaluating the impact on community partners is essential for assessing the overall impact of CES.

The primary objectives of this study were (1) to identify the potential benefits to community partners following the application of CES methods in a community-engaged classroom; and (2) to provide an example of how CES can help alleviate food insecurity. The article presents an exploratory study, designed as an introduction to the topic of how CES can address food insecurity. It is also designed to encourage others to capture the voices of community partners in CES projects. We begin by providing a literature review of CES, focusing on its potential to create sustainable and long-term social change within the community. This is followed by a review of the motivation behind our case study – the Farm To Fork project – and a brief description of its goals and objectives. Finally, we discuss findings related to the study, focusing on the community-university partnerships that were formed and the benefits derived from them. Based on survey data, the findings are presented in categories that best summarise the experiences of community partners with the project. These categories include mutual benefit, resources, networks and collaborations, and raising awareness and addressing social issues.

COMMUNITY-ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP

There is great potential when conventional education and scholarship merge with social change activism at the community level. Knowledge, ideas and solutions that are unique to this space and cannot be reproduced by the actors working independently can be created. There is also potential to expand social, cultural and human capital for all partners involved – including communities and universities – when resources are exchanged in a partnership based on authentic reciprocity (Hicks 2009). Community-engaged scholarship is one model aiming to achieve these outcomes. CES's core principles focus on reciprocity and mutual exchange of knowledge and resources (Beckman & Hay 2003; Israel et al. 1998; LaMarre & Hunter 2012; Melaville, Berg & Blank 2006; Roche 2008; Strand 2000). For the purpose of this study, CES was identified as a broad umbrella concept that captures all of these practices.

CES has a rich and diverse history. It stems from participatory research, which emerged as an alternative to the dominant positivist paradigm. Participatory research questions the aims of research and the role of values and power relations in research, and examines the role of the researcher in carrying out the research (Gruenewald 2003, 2008; Israel et al. 1998; Roche 2008; Strand 2000). Other models such as participatory action research, action research and empowerment research evolved independently as a critique of the conventional approaches to research, teaching and learning that informed policy and practice (Ball & Lai 2006; Strand 2000).

The work of Israel et al. (1998) contributed to the conceptual development of CES. They identified nine CES principles:

—Viewing community as a unit of identity
—Building on strengths and resources within the community
—Supporting collaborative, equitable partnerships in all aspects, facilitating empowerment and power-sharing processes
—Encouraging mutual learning and capacity building amongst all partners
—Promoting balance between knowledge production and action for mutual benefit for all partners
—Focusing on local knowledge and social and ecological perspectives
—Including cyclical and iterative systems development
—Disseminating findings to all parties and between all partners
—Emphasising a long-term commitment to sustainability.

These principles have in turn contributed to the more recent definitions of CES. In the health-related arena, the Kellogg Foundation has adopted the following definition based on the principles outlined above:

> *… a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. [CES] begins with a research topic of importance to the community with the aim of combining knowledge and action for social change to improve community health and eliminate health disparities.*

The definition established by the Kellogg Foundation has been used by various researchers and is recognised as a working definition for health and social research in Canada (Roche 2008). We will use this definition and the nine principles as benchmarks for assessing whether the Farm To Fork project met the potential of CES, particularly in relation to its community partners.

Participatory methods continue to play a significant role in CES. Under the CES model, community members have an active role in identifying the needs and challenges of the community, providing project inspiration, guiding researchers, collecting data, mobilising knowledge and facilitating the process to ensure the project produces and disseminates practical outputs (Edelglass 2009; Israel et al. 1998; Roche 2008). Strand (2000) claims that conventional scholarship stresses logic, rationality, absolute truth, power and control. Strand refers to 'separate knowers' as those adopting this type of knowledge production and taking an impersonal stance towards the object of knowing; in contrast, 'connected knowers' see intuition, creativity, experience and context as the factors essential to knowledge production. Hands-on collaborative learning is encouraged, with the goal being practical application. The latter type of knowing is essential for developing an in-depth understanding of issues (Strand 2000). It is this type of knowing that is often ignored in academia. Through CES, community partners can bring connected knowing to the academic arena. Community partners help situate researchers in a specific

sociopolitical context. Research then becomes locally defined and locally relevant (Azano 2011; Edelglass 2009; Israel et al. 1998; Roche 2008). CES encourages innovation, inclusiveness, and use of novel methods and techniques to address community needs. At its best, CES provides a unique but well-informed perspective on issues that can create successful long-term change, as well as advocating for policy change (Roche 2008; Semken & Freeman 2008).

However, the benefits of CES differ with different partnerships. CES may remain at the periphery of teaching practices (Hicks 2009; Semken & Freeman 2008; Strand 2000). In some cases, CES becomes a superficial model, where the aims are identified but not incorporated into the entire process. Some researchers (e.g. Roche 2008) illustrate that CES projects focus on the process and overlook the goals and outputs. Others claim that, in practice, CES has had limited success in providing sustainable solutions to social challenges (Ball & Lai 2006; Hicks 2009). This may relate to the notion that community partners do not have an equal role in CES projects. At worst, CES can humiliate, misrepresent and denigrate the community partners and communities they aim to help (Hicks 2009; Roche 2008). To avoid this, community knowledge, including values and experience, ought to be recognised as a valid form of evidence, equal to knowledge gained from scientific processes, as this would validate the community's perspective and their experiences would be heard and recognised. In practice, however, it may be difficult to give equal weight to different knowledge systems. Varying perspectives on experience, knowledge formation, theoretical frameworks and methodologies can contribute to power imbalances between community partners and academics.

FOOD INSECURITY

The concept of food insecurity has changed over time. Until the 1970s, food security referred mainly to the availability of food and was concerned with providing enough food to feed the population. More recent definitions encompass a breadth of other factors and problematise food security. These definitions stem from human rights and social justice considerations. One of the most used definitions of food security was articulated by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in the Rome Declaration on World Food Security. It states: 'Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life' (FAO 1996). Riches (1999) perceives food security as a human right and argues that nutritious and culturally acceptable food ought to be available via a dependable and sustainable food supply and regular distribution channels. The Centre for Studies in Food Security at Ryerson University in Toronto, Canada, operates using five criteria for food security: food availability, accessibility, adequacy, acceptability and agency (see www.ryerson.ca/foodsecurity/definition/resources/index.html).

Food security is achieved only when all criteria have been met. As such, food security not only means having access to food, but also having access to healthy, nutritious and culturally appropriate food, as well as the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes surrounding food issues.

Approximately 870 million people in the world are considered chronically undernourished (FAO 2012). The majority of these live in developing countries. Although disparities between countries remain, there appears to be a trend in the developing world to reduce hunger. Developed countries, such as Canada, on the other hand, are facing an increase in undernourishment and food insecurity (FAO 2012; Food Banks Canada 2012; Rosin, Stock & Campbell 2012; Tarasuk 2013). In Canada, about 3.9 million people, 12.3 per cent of the population, were defined as food insecure in 2011. This is about half a million more food insecure people compared to the figures for 2008 (Tarasuk 2013). Food insecurity plays a significant role in one's physical, mental and social health. Food insecurity in adults is linked to poor health, with increased risks of chronic illnesses, including diabetes, heart disease and depression. Food insecure children also face poorer health and increased risk of depression and suicidal tendencies (Tarasuk 2013).

Since the 1980s, emergency food providers (EFPs), such as food banks and food pantries, have been used to address food insecurity in Canada (Friel & Conlon 2004). In 2011, over 850 000 Canadians used food banks every month (Food Banks Canada 2012; Tarasuk 2013). Further, approximately 4 million meals were prepared in soup kitchens and school breakfast and similar programs (Food Banks Canada 2012). Although significant, it is estimated that only a quarter of food insecure Canadians use EFPs (Tarasuk 2013). For those identified as food insecure, poor food quality and quantity provided were identified as one reason for not seeking the assistance of an EFP. Other reasons included not wanting to receive food in the form of charity and not feeling that their situation was dire enough (Tarasuk 2013).

The focus on non-perishable food items as the major source of food donated to EFPs has received increasing criticism. As previously mentioned, appropriate food quantity and quality are necessary to declare an individual food secure. Many non-perishable food items are regarded as poor quality, or lacking essential nutrients (Friel & Conlon 2004; Rosin, Stock & Campbell 2012). Increasing the quantity of fresh produce would improve the overall quality of food donated, and may positively impact the health of those using EFPs. Further, increasing the quality of donations received by the EFPs might also encourage those who do not use EFPs and who are food insecure to begin using them. Food insecurity is a serious issue facing all Canadians that requires a more in-depth and holistic approach to alleviate the immediate pressure of food insecurity as well as to motivate sustainable change at the policy level (FAO 2012; Friel & Conlon 2004; Riches 1999).

FARM TO FORK

Farm To Fork – a novel CES approach to the problem of food insecurity – was designed by students in a third-year required course (Systems Analysis and Design in Applications) in the School of Computer Science at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada. The focus of the project was to improve the quality and quantity of food donated to EFPs by creating online tools to better connect them with their donors. Brokered by the University of Guelph's Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship (ICES), and building on existing relationships with the University of Guelph's Research Shop (RS), the students worked with three community partners: the Guelph-Wellington Food Round Table, the Food Access Working Group and the Food Distribution Working Group.

History and Goals of the Project

Farm To Fork was motivated by a need to understand how to better connect donors to the community groups who serviced those people who were food insecure. Working with community partners, the students were challenged to conceive and build a system that could facilitate direct links between EFPs and donors to enhance the quantity and quality of food donated. Specifically, students were tasked with increasing the quantity of farm fresh food that would end up on the forks of those who needed it most – hence the name Farm To Fork. Within a reverse classroom framework, the students built two working prototypes of what would eventually become Farm To Fork. Instead of using class time for traditional lectures, students were required to use that time to further the project. This novel approach resulted in unprecedented attendance levels as well as an overwhelming sense of accomplishment from the students.

The freedom allowed students to use a combination of information learned in the course, interaction with community partners and prototyping to develop a thoughtful approach to a complex social issue. The resulting program was a relatively simple web interface that allows EFPs to post specific needs in 'real time'. The system then sends out a weekly newsletter that alerts donors and allows them to commit to providing some or all of the required resources. Individuals and community partners can create an account and sign up for weekly newsletters at www.farm-to-fork.ca. Since the end of the course in Fall 2013, several students have continued to work on the project. Students remain active at all levels of Farm To Fork. Beyond beta-testing and development, students are actively engaged with both fundraising and promotion as they relate to Farm To Fork.

Community Partners

From the outset, Farm To Fork's community partners were at the core of the process. Frequently, these types of arrangements suffer from power disparities in which community agencies are reliant on university partners and feel they are not active and equal participants in the process.

Beginning with the initial conversation brokered by the ICES, the community partners were essential to forming the project

question that guided Farm To Fork. Throughout the development process, representatives from community agencies worked directly with students to build an understanding of the requirements and to provide feedback at various stages of progress. At present, students are working directly with members of the Guelph-Wellington Food Round Table to test and improve the software. Further, it is the students who are working with EFPs to train their personnel to use Farm To Fork.

By partnering with community agencies, team members were provided with access to a wealth of local food security expertise. Previous research from the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship/The Research Shop (2011, 2012) provided team members with a basis on which to develop the program. The direct involvement of community partners meant that Farm To Fork was developed in a way that met community needs rather than as simply an academic exercise.

Future of the Project

From its outset, Farm To Fork was designed to be an open-source website that was easily expandable and transferable. The intent was to freely provide access to the system to anyone who might wish to use it, regardless of their location. The Farm To Fork team is currently exploring extensions of the program which include (1) incorporating location-based technologies for smartphones that will remind donors of EFP needs when they near a grocery store or EFP; (2) creating direct links between Farm To Fork and national grocery chains; and (3) based on interest received from across Canada, the United States and Europe, providing access to any agency throughout the world through the existing program. While anecdotal evidence suggests that the Farm To Fork project will improve the quality and quantity of food donated to the emergency food system, we continue to work with local emergency food providers to collect necessary data to quantify the impact of the project. These metrics will be necessary as we bring the project to neighbouring cities. It is important to note that Farm To Fork operates on a not-for-profit basis. Although there is potential to commercialise this model and the future outputs of the project, the founders of Farm To Fork do not have any intention to do so.

IMPACT OF THE PROJECT ON THE COMMUNITY

It is recognised that one of the most profound benefits of CES is to provide communities and community partners with a voice (Beckman & Hay 2003; Graham 2007; Hicks 2009; Melaville, Berg & Blank 2006). While challenges faced by communities may be initially recognised by academia, they can be addressed in a way that validates community partners as valid actors in producing knowledge and being part of the solution process. To capture the experiences of the community partners in the Farm To Fork project, as well as community members from Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health and Guelph Community Health Centre, all were asked to complete a short survey comprised of

open-ended questions about their experience with the professor and co-founder of Farm To Fork, the students, the process and the outcomes of the project. The community partners took part in various essential aspects of the project, including providing first-hand knowledge and information on food insecurity in Guelph-Wellington, suggesting the processes that could help address food insecurity in the region, participating in various stages of the decision-making process and mentoring students. Excerpts from the surveys are presented below. They are embedded in relevant literature that demonstrates the benefits of CES to community members. The Farm To Fork community partners' answers can be divided into four categories: mutual benefit, resources, networking and collaborations, and raising awareness and addressing social issues. We discuss each in more detail below.

Mutual Benefit

One of the foundations of CES is reciprocity. CES focuses on providing mutual benefit to all partners involved. As Strand (2000) states, CES involves working with the community rather than for the community, or doing research on the community. Working with community partners can be beneficial to the community as well as students, faculty and the university (LaMarre & Hunter 2012; Strand 2000).

Students working within the CES model benefit from gaining skills not available to them via conventional teaching methods. Learning content and doing research with a purpose requires students to apply their knowledge, rather than simply illustrate their understanding of course materials. Various studies emphasise the high levels of enthusiasm and creativity that students are able to draw upon when working with community partners on addressing social issues (Melaville, Berg & Blank 2006; Semken & Freeman 2008; Showalter 2013; Strand 2000). The relationships students form with community partners are demonstrated in the commitment and dedication by students revealed in CES projects such as Farm To Fork. As one student from Farm To Fork stated, 'I consider [Farm To Fork] to be an experience that students should have a chance to do because it gives them a different perspective on their work and a chance to interact with people outside of the university'.

Professors can benefit from the CES model once methods have been put in place. Specifically, it has been found that teaching within a CES framework is less stressful and more enjoyable for professors than teaching using conventional methods (Melaville, Berg & Blank 2006; Semken & Freeman 2008; Showalter 2013). Higher education institutions can also benefit from CES: they often see higher levels of engagement and academic performance from their students (Semken & Freeman 2008; Showalter 2013). Exposure to CES can also encourage students to be active participants in school activities, their academic community and the broader communities in which they live (Edelglass 2009; LaMarre & Hunter 2012).

Communities and community members also derive benefit from the CES model. Communities directly benefit, as students are encouraged to respond to community-specific needs. Students often take part in activities such as community clean-ups, hospital and nursing home visits, and homeless shelter visits, where they directly assist those in need (Melaville, Berg & Blank 2006). Of course, CES is not limited to volunteering opportunities; it aims to address any community identified challenge. Engagement as a result of the CES model can create future engagement and volunteerism amongst students. As one community partner from Farm To Fork said:

> *There was a real sense in the lab that the students cared about the project's development and creating impactful outcomes. It appeared that they wanted to listen and refine their work to meet the needs of the project. The fact that some students wanted to continue to work on the project after marks had been distributed and the class had ended showed dedication and engagement and a real desire to see this project from start to finish!*

Experiencing students' enthusiasm and dedication to a CES project in turn encourages community partners and contributes to a positive and sustainable partnership between the community and higher education institutions (Gelmon et al. 1998; Israel et al. 1998). Through guidance from the professor and community partners, their academic knowledge and access to resources, students can help address more complex issues and formulate long-term sustainable solutions to community needs.

Community partners in the Farm To Fork project experienced the reciprocity that CES projects aim to achieve. As one community partner said, '[The project created] win–win opportunities for everyone involved. Students had an opportunity to meet course outcomes while the community benefited from the expected project outcomes'. In addition, community partners appreciated the professor's and students' creativity, enthusiasm and dedication to the project. The students, under the guidance of the professor and the community partners, offered novel perspectives on how technology could be used to address food insecurity and improve distribution of healthy food to individuals who were food insecure. Community partners were active in mentoring and providing guidance to the students. This indicates that the voices of the community partners were recognised and validated, which contributed to a sustained positive relationship between community partners, students and faculty, and strengthened the community-held perception that the CES-based partnership was beneficial (Gelmon et al. 1998; Hicks 2009). Community partners also recognised that working on a real community issue encouraged and motivated students to work hard on the project. The community partners acted as mentors and also as clients, for whom the students had to provide results. As the professor said,

'Instead of working for a professor (who would have acted as the students' client in a conventional class format), they worked with a professor and a *real* client'.

Resources

The CES model encourages an exchange of resources between all members in an effort to identify and address solutions to community and societal problems (Davidson et al. 2010; Edelglass 2009; Showalter 2013; Strand 2000). However, much of the literature examines the increased resources available to students via CES-related projects; for example, Melaville, Berg & Blank (2006) claim that CES increases resources available to students. Students also find mentors and support from community partners, which helps them broaden their network. Community partners also provide resources that can be used in teaching (Israel et al. 1998; Semken & Freeman 2008). However, there is limited literature on how community resources increase as a result of university-community partnerships, although Gelmon et al. (1998) did find that community partners appreciate having access to university resources, including the library, campus facilities and meeting spaces.

Farm To Fork community partners reported that the project increased their access to resources, including expertise and time. This was valuable, as many community organisations were faced with limited access to resources to help address food insecurity issues. The community members recognised that access to resources and expertise gained via the partnership would not otherwise have been made available for the benefit of the community. As one community partner confirmed, 'This is an innovative solution to a community issue that could not have been done without the support of the professor and students with the limited resources that the [Guelph-Wellington Food Round Table] has'.

As previously mentioned, some authors believe that CES projects are preoccupied with the process and ensuring it is collaborative and mutually beneficial, and often overlook the intended outcomes of the project (Roche 2008). However, the partners of the Farm To Fork project did recognise that the end product could be a valuable potential resource to the community. The online tools created by Farm To Fork were recognised as a valuable resource that community partners and potentially EFPs across Canada could use to facilitate healthy food distribution and ultimately help individuals and families within any community gain access to healthier foods. This would help increase nourishment and health and provide some immediate relief amongst those experiencing food insecurity.

Networking and Collaborations

CES enables the facilitation of networks where information and resources can be exchanged, as well as the connection of individuals and organisations that otherwise would not be connected. The community partners recognise that the work of the partnership has increased the capacity to address food insecurity

in the Guelph-Wellington area and has highlighted local action around food insecurity. With the help of the university and faculty, the Farm To Fork project has helped link various community actors working around food insecurity, furthering useful partnerships and collaborations. As one community member stated, 'Most [Food Access Working Group] members are EFPs who will benefit from the Farm To Fork by having increased opportunities to connect with providers and community members to bring healthier foods to their service users'. This has helped all community partners involved to expand their network and gain support and resources for the work they are doing around food insecurity. This type of impact has been identified in CES literature. Semken and Freeman (2008) and Hicks (2009) demonstrate that use of the CES model has assisted in unifying community partners and academics working together on community initiatives via working groups, steering committees and round tables, which in turn has the potential to increase capacity and social capital in the community (Gelmon et al. 1998).

The professor who led the project in the class appears to have played a significant role in creating a strong relationship between the community partners, as well as positive perceptions of the partnership and the Farm To Fork project in the community. As one community partner said:

> *He was actively engaged in many community events that brought community partners together to ensure he was staying connected and being instrumental in pulling all of the pieces together. This takes a huge amount of effort and time which he was willing to give to the project. I also noted how much he tied in other community work around food security into the social networking streams of the Farm To Fork project to further engage the community as much as possible in the Farm To Fork project and related community initiatives. The professor was a true champion in this project and continues to play a critical role in the fruition of this work.*

CES encourages faculty as well as students to expand their roles to include involvement with the community (Davidson et al. 2010). Gelmon et al. (1998) demonstrate that community partners greatly appreciate faculty taking the time to visit and develop relationships and trust with them. Hicks (2009) confirms that one of the aspects that community partners look forward to is relationship building with faculty and students. It is essential to the CES model that community partners be involved with conception of the project focus (Beckman & Hay 2003). As mentioned above, community partners in the Farm To Fork project were responsible for identifying the issue and, together with faculty, developing a tool that would address this concern of the emergency food providers.

Raising Awareness and Addressing Social Issues

One of the major benefits of the project identified by the Farm To Fork community partners was the increased awareness of food insecurity issues. Another was the growing appreciation that a real

social issue was being addressed in a way that would improve the lives of those who were food insecure. The Farm To Fork project not only used a variety of social networking media to highlight the project (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Wordpress), but also brought to light food insecurity issues and educated the public about them. As one community partner confirmed, 'The Guelph Community Health Centre appreciates that this particular project is addressing one of the key social determinants of health – food – for those living in poverty in our community. I know we will have data on the actual amounts of food, time and money donated, but the impact on the students and the community is what I am talking about.' As mentioned previously, CES literature often focuses on the impacts on students and faculty. Awareness about food insecurity in the Guelph-Wellington region was not only increased amongst students but also the community at large. The project provided opportunities for community members to learn about the issues faced by those who were food insecure and using EFPs. It also educated the public about the major players addressing food insecurity in Guelph-Wellington. By exposing the issues EFPs faced in a forum that could easily be accessed by many community members, it encouraged all citizens to play a part in addressing these issues. Actions such as purchasing fresh produce and donating it to an EFP that requires it helps break the preconceived notion that we can only donate non-perishable food items and helps improve the health of those in need.

It is important to note that although many activities and outcomes characteristic of CES were achieved during the Farm To Fork project, not all were the result of deliberate steps in the project. Many were unforeseen. The presence and active contribution of community partners during the various stages of the project, as well as honest, open and transparent communication between community partners, students and faculty were essential to the progression of the project. All members of the project reached a consensus on goals and how those goals should be achieved, and were dedicated to achieving them. As a result, many outcomes of the project were unplanned and developed without conditions outlined at the beginning.

LIMITATIONS OF THE PROJECT

Although community partners were largely satisfied with the process and expected and unexpected outcomes of the project, they were concerned with project timelines. Students and faculty largely schedule their events around the school semester. Overall, school activities such as class time and assignment deadlines are set without much flexibility, while community partners often have busy schedules that are less established and set. Community partners found it difficult sometimes to blend the two schedules and timelines. As one community partner stated, 'Coordinating schedules of community partners and the students can be a limitation at times. For example, when students host labs during

class times for community partners to test different phases of the project it can sometimes be hard having the right community partners attend at fixed class times.' The limitations around scheduling also contributed to difficulties in communication. Being unable to coordinate meetings with all members present and discuss important issues and steps of the project can limit and skew the input and feedback provided on the project. The limitations caused by rigid and potentially short-sighted academic calendars have been documented also in other studies (Gelmon et al. 1998; Hicks 2009). Academic schedules are believed to be too inflexible to address community concerns that require holistic, long-term commitment. The Farm To Fork project was able to address this issue by having students work on the project throughout the summer and incorporating impending phases of the project in other classes. Finding financial resources to support students during the summer, careful planning and immense dedication on behalf of the professor were essential to the continuation of the project throughout the school semesters and breaks.

CONCLUSION

The benefits of taking part in a CES project far outweigh the limitations for community members. CES has significant potential for positive impacts on students, faculty and community-based organisations. CES can be a powerful tool for improving students' academic performance and their sense of social responsibility, and can provide them with a better understanding of developing solutions to community problems. Evaluating community impacts is an essential, yet often overlooked, part of assessing CES projects.

This article described the experiences of community partners during the Farm To Fork project. Results show that all partners benefited from the project and that community partners gained vast resources and developed networks and collaborations that otherwise they would not have had access to. Most importantly, the project raised awareness about food insecurity among the members of the project and the community at large and found tangible solutions to this community problem. Such achievements in our communities do not benefit just one group of people, but benefit us all.

This study was exploratory in nature and would benefit from expansion. The authors hope that it will inspire others to capture the voices of community members involved in CES projects. It could also act as a starting point for further exploring the role of CES in issues of food insecurity.

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