



Rhetorical Strategies of the Postsecondary Community Service-Learning Movement in Canada

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Abstract

This article analyzes the rhetorical strategies of the community service-learning movement in Canada, offering a description of the movement for both Canadian and international readers who are familiar with service-learning. The article first provides a general comparison of the context, features and progress of the Canadian community service-learning (CSL) movement in light of the American service-learning movement. It then it analyzes the unique messages and features of the Canadian movement using social movement theory and rhetorical theory as a frame. It concludes with recommendations regarding the rhetorical strategies and organizational structures that are likely to be ethical and effective in forwarding the CSL initiative in Canada and adapting it to the unique cultural, social and political contexts of its higher education system. These insights are offered from the perspective of a Canadian faculty member from the discipline of rhetorical studies who teaches, researches, and leads in the movement both nationally and locally.

Introduction

Community service-learning faces unique rhetorical challenges in each national context where it is implemented. The framework of associations and funders plays a shaping role in that rhetoric, as does the culture of the institutions involved in the early years of implementation. The Canadian movement, which travels by the name of "community service-learning" (often abbreviated as CSL), builds on the momentum and history of the American service-learning movement but cannot seem to be a direct import from America; it must show sensitivity to Canadian leaders' values and social structures. The history, aims, and audiences of the movement differ, the Canadian movement focusing more on higher education than on

kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12). Some challenges with key terms and metaphors are similar across the US-Canada border, but even when this is the case, the specific reasons and solutions differ slightly.

Written from a Canadian faculty member's perspective, this analysis of the movement provides international readers with a glimpse into the Canadian movement, offers a rhetorician's reflections and advice to those who lead in Canada, and articulates the movement to Canadian academics and citizens who may wish to understand some of the distinctive features and challenges of "Canadian" community service-learning.

In Canada, community service-learning is practiced in a variety of languages including our official language of French, is contextualized by provincial ministries of education and local cultural settings, may involve international service-learning experiences, and occurs in a variety of K-12 and postsecondary institutions as well as outside of higher education institutions through organizations like Katimavik and Canada World Youth. Therefore the scope of my study is limited in several ways. I will focus on the CSL movement in the English language, and on rhetoric that involves partnerships with students and faculty members in research universities within credit courses. Because I am a faculty member I focus relatively more on the university-based audiences and speakers/writers than on those from the community sector, even though both are equally important.

The rhetorical criticism and advice is shaped by its author's vantage point and values: I write as an author based in the discipline of rhetorical studies, as one who has implemented many CSL partnerships in courses, as one who has been involved in leading CSL initiatives in my faculty and university, as a researcher studying the rhetorical aspects of the CSL movement, and as a member of the *Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning*. I take both a critical and affirming view of the strengths and weaknesses in CSL rhetoric and hope to serve a productive purpose to improve CSL rhetoric in Canada and to build international awareness of the Canadian CSL movement at the time of writing.

Theoretical perspectives

I will investigate CSL movement rhetoric through two lenses: social movement theory and rhetorical theory. Social movement theory, as described from a Canadian perspective by William Carroll, has evolved from "resource mobilization theories" to "new social movement theory." I will discuss the ways in which rhetoric, whether it is recognized by movement theorists or not, is central to new social movement theory.

In the older set of theories of resource mobilization, a professional Social Movement Organization, or SMO, spends much of its time and effort gathering resources, financial, physical and human, including the resources from a group called "conscience constituents," defined as "supporters who do not stand to benefit directly from the success of the

movement" (Carroll, p. 11). Carroll describes an SMO as one with "outside leadership, full time paid staff, small or nonexistent membership, resources from conscience constituencies, and actions that 'speak for' rather than involve an aggrieved group" (Jenkins 1983: 533, as quoted in Carroll, p. 11). The CSL movement can be described through both of these types of theories. The national organization for Canadian CSL can be described as an SMO.

Critics of the older theories of social movement organizing point out that the literature idolizes instrumental rationality, professional expertise, and organizational forms that imitate the establishment that they are often intended to transform. They also point out that this theory focuses so much on the pragmatic mechanics of the organization and its status as a credible and rational political agent that it tends to overlook crucial issues regarding the messages and motives that are the heart of the social movement. Individual actors may not be motivated by consumerist, instrumental or rational motives but rather by more altruistic values, the desire for group solidarity, and the new identity and sense of accomplishment that can be forged through collective action.

This is the point at which rhetoric becomes crucial in the study of social movements. New social movement theory focuses on interpretive factors that focus on the framing or definition of situations and of the redefinition of people's roles and identities within those situations. Alberto Melucci (1989), a social theorist studying the identity based movements of the 1960s and 70s, wrote that new social movements mount "symbolic challenges which publicize novel dilemmas and problems, the clarification of which requires new definitions of freedom and the recognition of new rights and responsibilities" (Melucci p. 11; as quoted in Carroll, p. 17). Melucci's view of symbolic social action, as well as Snow and Benford's (1992) theory of "framing," work well in concert with theories of rhetorical situation and definition, and of rhetoric as social action. Yet rhetoricians who have examined social movement theory have pointed out that in spite of the recognition of the importance of communication, sociologists and psychologists have tended to continue focusing on structures and avoid examining the content of argumentation involved in such framing (Hopkins and Reicher, 1997).

Social innovation cannot be enacted or sustained without rhetorical action. Rhetoric is the medium through which institutions and innovations take shape, since symbolic communication is the only strategy with which humans share visions of an intangible shared future. Once a movement is successful in altering the configuration of social life, rhetoric remains important in the wording of the new policies, new genres of communication, and in the ongoing interpretation and application of policies and documents. Therefore, leaders of social movements must be equally concerned about how new institutional relationships and organizational structures may influence the ethics and effectiveness of rhetoric that will occur within them.

Therefore rhetoricians involved in studying social movements and innovation must be equally concerned about the growth and transformation of the rhetorical forums or situations as they are about the specific communication strategies used within existing forums. Within social

movements, organizational structures, speakers' roles and audiences' identities considerably influence the definition of the rhetorical situation at every level, as they alter the purpose, the audience, and the degree of power and type of interest each party in the dialogue. Rhetorical forums with unequal power relationships, narrow organizational aims, and unequal representation of stakeholders will be less conducive to ethical and effective collaborative rhetoric with broader social aims and a more inclusive range of actors.

Instead of taking time to explain rhetorical theories in isolation, I will define and illustrate their relevance as I apply them to the movement. Throughout my discussion I must sometimes talk about language strategies, and sometimes talk about the ways institutional structures, roles and identities are both formed through rhetoric as well as influence the rhetorical strategies, recognizing that the two are closely intertwined since institutions both communicate and are constituted through communication.

Canadian and American contexts for CSL rhetoric

A national service-learning movement has existed in the United States since the mid 1980s. American service-learning came under the influence of large funding and organizing agencies such as Learn and Serve America, Campus Compact and the Kellogg Foundation. American service-learning has advanced largely through forging alliances with colleges and universities. By 1991 Campus Compact had over 500 member institutions, and this number has doubled in the past fifteen years (Campus Compact, "History", 2007). American service-learning rhetoric frequently names "democracy" as a key philosophy underpinning CSL, and frequently cites the 1857 Morrill Act that established land-grant universities in the United States in order to establish the historical importance of community service in American higher education.

Canadian universities' community service learning programs have only recently become a national movement. The national organization is not funded by the federal government. The J. W. McConnell Family Foundation, after spending six years and 16 million dollars supporting Canadian universities who wanted to restructure themselves to focus more on teaching and learning, recognized that universities would be more likely to be effectively transformed through establishing curricular partnerships with communities. In 2004, the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation called for CSL funding applications from Canadian universities. Before closing their university-based service-learning program funding initiative in 2006, the foundation had distributed almost 10 million dollars to ten Canadian institutions to integrate service-learning within their curriculum. The foundation also funded the creation of the Canadian Alliance for Community Service Learning, abbreviated as CACSL.

One comparative measure of the prevalence of service-learning in Canada and the United States is the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Since the vast majority of "public research doctoral universities" who participate in NSSE are located in the United States, the prevalence of service-learning in Canada compared to the United States can be inferred by the

difference in the frequency data from Canadian institutions in this category, compared with the frequency data for all institutions in this category, as seen in Table 1. A significant gap exists between the Canadian data and North American (largely United States) data in the same year. In 2008, the frequency of "never" having participated in service-learning in a course in Canadian public doctoral research universities was 77% of first-year and 70% of senior-year students; for all public doctoral research universities (most of which are American), the frequency was as low as 63% and 58%, respectively—a 12-14% gap (Mean Comparisons, 2008, p. 23). To see the growth of service-learning over time, one may compare similar data from 2004, 2007, and 2008. There was a significant change over the years in the frequency of students who reported "never" having "participated in a community-based project (e.g. service learning) as part of a regular course." The prevalence of students reporting service-learning participation improved slightly even between 2007 and 2008, but a larger degree of improvement was seen among the Canadian institutions.

The Canadian CSL movement draws heavily upon the American service-learning movement for theories, advice, and precedents. It has provided the Canadian CSL movement with a sense of legitimacy and a large body of scholarly research on service-learning. However, the majority of Canadian CSL rhetoric is *not* driven by arguments about democracy or university history. Only in the Western provinces were universities created in the land-grant tradition, and Central- and Eastern-Canadian universities largely have a religious origin. Instead, our national CSL rhetoric, as seen on the CACSL website, is driven by the success of our diverse partnerships and the needs of local and global communities.

H. Brooke Hessler (2000) in her analysis of service-learning rhetoric in the United States, has applied rhetorical theories of Richard Weaver by pointing out which words in the movement's rhetoric function as "god terms" and "devil terms." Richard Weaver, who wrote in the 1950s in the wake of the second world war, cautioned rhetoricians to be careful about using "god terms" and "devil terms" because of their vague definition and propagandistic tendencies. Hessler says that key terms in American service-learning rhetoric are "citizenship" and "democracy" which are rarely defined or challenged. The devil terms used by service-learning advocates in their manifestos tend to be "customer" and "efficiency," words that evoke a contrasting vision of the university as a corporation. The term "accountability," Hessler explains, is used to negotiate between the democratic vision and the corporate vision.

However, while Canadian CSL rhetoric also has its god-terms and devil-terms, the majority of Canadian CSL rhetoric is not driven by arguments about democracy, citizenship, or efficiency. The majority of Canadian CSL rhetoric is driven by arguments about the needs of local communities and global contexts, and is spurred by a vision to make university research and teaching and service more socially responsible and to make learning more engaging for contemporary students. In my experience of reading and hearing many examples of Canadian CSL rhetoric, it rarely invokes Canadian national identity, but when it does, it often invokes the late-twentieth-century Canadian concern with social cohesion, fairness, and health in the face of forces that divide us, such as immigration, multiculturalism, language, and literacy, and the

struggle for proportionate revenue resources between our separate provinces. Beyond this, the majority of social issues commonly addressed by CSL are provincial matters, such as the distribution of resources to the social and voluntary sector in relation to the other sectors of provincial governance such as health and agriculture.

Table 1: National Survey of Student Engagement: Frequency Distributions for question 1k, "Participated in a community-based project (e.g. service learning) as part of a regular course"

2004	First-year Students		Senior year Students	
	University of Calgary*	All Pub Doct Rsrch	University of Calgary*	All Pub Doct Rsrch
Never	86%	62%	78%	52%
Sometimes	9%	26%	15%	29%
Often	4%	9%	5%	11%
Very often	1%	4%	3%	7%
2007	First-year Students		Senior year Students	
	Canadian peers	All Pub Doct Rsrch	Canadian peers	All Pub Doct Rsrch
Never	83%	66%	71%	58%
Sometimes	11%	23%	18%	27%
Often	4%	8%	6%	9%
Very often	2%	3%	4%	6%
2008	First-year Students		Senior year Students	
	Canadian peers	All Pub Doct Rsrch	Canadian peers	All Pub Doct Rsrch
Never	77%	63%	70%	58%
Sometimes	16%	24%	20%	27%
Often	5%	9%	7%	9%
Very often	2%	4%	4%	5%

* for 2004, "Canadian peers" data could not be located. All data is found in reports published on the University of Calgary website, which compare local results with results from larger groups of institutions.

Sources: (NSSE 2004 Engagement Item, 2004, p. 2; NSSE 2007 Engagement Item, 2007, p. 1; Mean Comparisons, 2008, p. 23)

Canadian CSL Movement rhetoric

At the national level, the Canadian Alliance for Community Service Learning (CACSL), the only national organization at the time of writing, seeks to provide not only a pool of resources and professional legitimacy to the movement as outlined by the resource mobilization theory, but to provide CSL practitioners and leaders at the local level with the tools they need to transform their own institutions, identities and relationships. One of the challenges that CACSL faces is the need to enact within its own organization at the national level the methods and values that prove the effectiveness of the model at more local levels. The CACSL steering committee is continually challenged to innovate and open itself to partnership as it forms its own identity, since it is all too easy to adopt rhetorical genres and communication processes followed by the organizations it seeks to transform.

Sustainability is still a key term in Canadian CSL discourse, and this phase of institutionalization has now demonstrated that the movement can be accommodated within university systems. Granting agencies such as McConnell, Carthy Foundation, and Max Bell Foundation, who have provided essential grants to CACSL, have been much more interested in social innovation, community participation, and community impact than the institutionalization of a program within a university's infrastructure. Indeed, the national service-learning movement in Canada, because of the influences of its funders and its national scope, has taken a transformational approach toward universities, not a conservative one. Community service-learning not only seeks to redefine the public identity of institutions of higher education, but seeks to shift the social and professional identities of students, researchers and teachers in higher education toward being more community-oriented.

An opening rhetorical strategy is necessary at the outset of a social movement: the definition of the problem or issue that the movement aims to address. The CSL movement seeks to redefine the sense of "exigence" for transformation within higher education and civil society organizations in the community. Exigence is a term in rhetorical theory which names the social need or motive to speak. Each rhetorical act needs to either presume or convince the audience that an exigence exists. The exigence of the CSL movement can be summarized thus—

our society is currently experiencing the fragmentation of knowledge, resources and skills narrowly within individual sectors, institutions, and organizations, and each organization separately is suffering a decrease in human and financial resources that makes it less capable of fulfilling its social mission, whether that mission is of education and knowledge generation, or of various forms of social aid or social sustainability.

Unlike social justice movements like feminism or anti-slavery, CSL rhetoric is not predicated on proving that an injustice exists, which usually involves someone taking the blame for that injustice. In Canada, it is relatively easy to demonstrate the exigence, and this part of the argument forges a common ground between CSL leaders and their diverse audiences. The Canadian definition of the problem forges a strong sense of common ground between

movement leaders and their diverse audiences, helping universities and communities identify with each other.

In order to address social problems, social movement rhetoric proposes a method toward achieving solutions. This is step two, the main thesis of its argument. The thesis of the CSL movement can be paraphrased thus:

Universities and civil society organizations should be engaging in collaborative inquiry and action together. The community-university partnership should extend beyond the traditional notions of applied research and service on the part of academics and program research and service on the part of communities. It should extend into mutual teaching and learning through the integration of student projects and activities.

CSL rhetoric is a form of what the rhetorician Wayne Booth would call "listening rhetoric," in which one seeks to genuinely understand another's perspective before trying to persuade them, and to engage in genuine dialogue during persuasion, keeping one's mind open to being persuaded by one's audience. Going beyond listening rhetoric, CSL engages in a community-building rhetoric whose aim is to collaborate in the design of an institutional and social innovation at the local level.

The thesis of the Canadian CSL movement goes deeper than a proposed method for learning. Within CSL methodology is embedded a philosophy. CSL rhetoric not only outlines a win-win situation of mutual benefit, but it has an "edge" of persuasion and innovation similar to identity-based movements like feminism and political movements like affirmative action or corporate social responsibility. CSL partnerships involve a shift in institutional structure, values, and participating individuals' roles and identities. The Canadian movement posits something like the following statement:

A genuinely equal partnership is necessary at every level of a partnership between academics and their communities, as well as an integration and balance between theory and practice throughout partnership discourse and activity.

CSL is a far-reaching social movement that seeks to integrate the identity of the student or faculty member so that facets of their academic and social identities are no longer fragmentary, and which seeks to re-imagine the community as a partner in higher education.

The activities of mutual engagement in CSL are not limited to community-based research, as is the case with other movements driven by academic and government agencies, as seen in the promotion of "scholarly outreach" and commercial applications of research, and community-university research alliances (CURA) funded by the Canadian federal government's research-granting council, the social sciences and humanities research council (SSHRC). Community service-learning partnerships entail partnership in a certain form of engaged research, but reach much broader into other activity systems—those of teaching, learning and service.

Canadian movement leaders have inherited the common term “service-learning” but have added the word “community” in front, as mentioned at the outset of this article. Thus, the term “community” is central. Granting agencies who have provided funds to CACSL and universities are very interested in social innovation, community participation, and community impact. Therefore, unlike the American movement, higher education is not the central stage of the initiative. The frame or context is the whole community, and universities are only part of the community writ large, as in the following summary:

The movement seeks to increase the capacity of community partners to welcome universities into CSL partnerships and to collaborate effectively with universities, as well as to transform universities by helping them to establish policies that value and sustain CSL partnerships.

However, one of the key terms in CSL rhetoric on both sides of the border is causing some significant challenges in clarifying the values, roles, and relationships in CSL. The term is “service.” In discussing this word with university-based CSL leaders in the past three years, I have repeatedly heard expressions of frustration about the misunderstandings due to this term. The word does not invoke the ethic of innovative, multi-level, equal partnership that the movement now depends upon.

There are at least three academic contexts in which service is problematic term in universities. First of all, in faculty committees and collegial discourse the term “service” is generally associated with “unscholarly or *subscholarly* tasks” (p. 32). H. Brooke Hessler, in her rhetorical analysis of the American CSL movement, begins her article with a clear and bold example of a Stanford administrator who was reluctant to use the words “service-learning” and “experiential learning” for fear that it would be perceived by faculty “as some sort of ‘touchy-feely’ exercise” (p. 27). Hessler explains that in rhetorical terms, “Faculty are often wary of what appear to be trendy programs that will divert their students (and their professors) from rigorous scholarship to pursue such ideals as Citizenship or Service” (p. 27). “Service” is what professors call their internal university committee work, a duty that many professors can perform at a very minimal level, and service duties can be excused when a faculty member’s research priorities conflict with it. Similarly, a “service course” usually means a large-enrollment first- or second-year course that “serves” students from a variety of faculties and programs across the university, and this type of course is usually taught largely by low-status teachers.

Secondly, in professional contexts outside of universities and the nonprofit sector, “services” are provided by paid employees to a client or customer. When faculty members engage in external university service to the community, it is often seen as a generous extension of their professional superiority and knowledge to those who are in need of their service or knowledge. The service relationship is often viewed as voluntary on the part of the service provider or researcher, and is often short term, lasting only as long as his or her professional interests make it beneficial to the researcher. The community is expected to either pay for his or her expertise with honoraria or to express their gratitude symbolically in ways that reinforce

the status of the professional. While academics stand to gain from having a research agenda that is perceived as socially relevant and beneficial, they also desire autonomy to pursue research that is unfettered by the interests of corporations, governments, or organizations. It is considered academically suspect to have one's research priorities and processes influenced by the needs of an outside community, as in the case of research funded by pharmaceutical companies.

Thirdly, in the context of the norm of paid service in society, "service" can also have unsavory meanings for students that raises the specter of exploitation or which blurs it with volunteerism. In an increasingly consumer-driven society, service commonly means low paid "customer service" positions in retail or hotel and restaurant contexts, and such services are frequently provided by university-age students because the more desirable careers now require a bachelor's degree. Paid customer service labor is a practical way to fund one's education, and voluntary service is not just motivated by altruism but is recommended as a way to build up one's resume. Thus, to the university-age server community, "service-learning" can invoke analogies to retail positions (whether via an intended contrast or comparison, it still comes to mind as relevant), and service-learning can seem to likewise be a temporary, elementary and low-status means to an end.

The methods of CSL also require the community sector to think differently about service. While civil society organizations have acknowledged the changing face of volunteerism to include more short-term and flexible models that suit people's lifestyles, it is too easy for community organizations to consider CSL as something that fits easily within an existing volunteerism frame, when in fact it has more complicated needs and is not volunteerism. Therefore the words "academic partnership" and "student project," which invoke collaboration with the university, will be much more useful than "service" or "volunteerism" in explaining to community partners the nature of CSL initiatives. In my conclusion I will offer some practical recommendations for dealing with the word "service" in service-learning.

Finally, the Canadian CSL movement concludes its message with the benefits that it claims for its participants. To be effective rhetoric, the benefits must outweigh the costs of transformation. This is its claim, roughly summarized:

Any given CSL partnership's success can be measured by the increase in human resources, knowledge, and effective collaboration within the whole partnership, not just the education of students and the immediate community outcomes of their service. Sharing resources results in increased capacity for each institution to fulfill its mission, and higher social and economic sustainability.

The discovery of appropriate methods and standards is still under development, but the rhetorical statement of benefit nevertheless fulfills an important function. It provides what social movement theorists Snow and Benford would call a "master frame" that helps to

negotiate between various “frame disputes” that may arise due to each sector’s unique way of envisioning its situation and mission.

Other movements and frames within higher education have created “frame disputes” within the movement. The “student engagement” movement has added momentum to the CSL movement, but has also created competing priorities for CSL within the higher education sector. *Maclean’s* magazine university rankings have performed a similar role in Canada as the *U.S. News & World Report’s* university rankings play in the United States. Since the *Maclean’s* magazine’s research methods for ranking of universities have come under scrutiny and many universities protested and opted out, in its place has arisen the National Survey of Student Engagement, with a Canadian version adapted from the well-known American survey instrument. The Canadian survey is adapted to a new nation’s institutional interests, it imported some language from the American survey and therefore includes a question about “service-learning:” Under the heading of *Academic and Intellectual Experiences*, Canadian surveys since 2007 asked students how frequently they “Participated in a community-based project (e.g. service learning) as part of a regular course” (the parenthetical information that names service learning was not present in earlier versions). But the “student engagement” movement will not be sufficient as a means of extending the CSL movement, and in some cases has become a distraction, and in some cases may undermine CSL structures and values. The aims of the student engagement movement are not as cross-sectoral as CSL. The NSSE instrument is utilized by administrators primarily for ranking and quality control measures, and it tends to focus on time spent in particular learning activities. It emphasizes growth in the number of students participating intensively in it, more than its quality and sustainability. It perceives engagement from the point of view of student activity alone, when CSL partnership is actually a three-way partnership between faculty, students, and the community. It considers the learning as something occurring through institutions of higher education rather than through community organizations.

Unfortunately, the student engagement movement has also resulted in competing priorities for CSL within the higher education sector. In fact, this “frame dispute” has contributed to a larger caution raised by John Cawley of the McConnell Foundation in a public letter posted on their website:

The Foundation is concerned that the preoccupation with increasing numbers – often being pushed by administrators for institutional reasons - may actually be harming the potential for substantial impact; the community placements may just be seen as “add-ons” to existing classroom activity instead of an opportunity to address community issues through a collaborative effort. (Cawley, Letter to Cheryl Rose, p.5)

Recommendations for Canadian CSL Rhetoric

What kinds of rhetoric are likely to be ethical and effective in forwarding the CSL initiative in Canada and adapting it to the unique cultural, social and political contexts of our higher education system?

Terminology

In this section I include recommendations for the use of the terms “community service learning” and “volunteerism.”

First of all, despite the problems with the word “service” in “service-learning,” I do not recommend dropping the term but rather shortening it to CSL and offering an explanation that frames service activities appropriately.

Some programs have already used other language for their offices that include CSL, such as the “Learning Exchange” at the University of British Columbia, “Experiential Learning” at York University. However, the activity of community service-learning can still be referred to as such within these organizations without a change in signage. To change the terminology for this activity in Canada would raise serious questions about the relevance of vast service-learning resources, history and scholarship, thus symbolically cutting it off from the American and global movement. As I mentioned earlier, in Canada we have already been relatively successful in altering the perspective by adding the word “community” in front.

In Canada, our three-word term is lengthy and has often necessitated the acronym CSL in contexts that use it. I see several rhetorical opportunities offered by our distinctive acronym. Most of all, it deemphasizes the problematic word “service.” Although some feel that any use of an acronym is puzzling, by frequent use it will achieve recognition in the same way as companies who have switched to acronyms. In Canada, CIBC and CBC are known primarily by their acronyms which deemphasize the words “imperial” and “corporation.”¹ By frequent use, the acronym CSL will achieve recognition. On May 19, 2008 a Google.ca search produced 855 Canadian web pages that used both the terms “CSL” and “community service learning.”

In the university context,

- The acronym allows us to add nouns after it that name the collaborative and sustainable nature of the innovation, such as “CSL partnership” and “CSL alliance.” In fact, I would recommend that the CSL movement decide to use “CSL partnership” or “CSL alliance” as the new standard

¹ To inform non-Canadian readers, CIBC means Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce; CBC means Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

term in order to emphasize active community participation and the serious, long-term commitment of universities to these partnerships.

- Within courses, teachers and students should use the terms “community partner” and “community project” to emphasize the community as both guide and audience.
- The acronym CSL should more often be paired side by side with its close relative in research methodology, Community Based Research (CBR).

Secondly, in the future, CSL rhetoric should use the term “volunteerism” sparingly if at all. John Cawley’s reflections on the lessons learned by the McConnell Foundation reflects on the problems arising from service learning experiences which have lacked academic structure and assessment and thus have seemed closer to volunteerism. Community service-learning is not a voluntary initiative if it takes place within a credit course or thesis, even if the course is optional or the student’s choice, because the academic credit and grade are a tangible outcome. Even when community service-learning exists in non-credit leadership programs, spring break service initiatives, and community-based organizations, the term can create the impression that CSL is closer to volunteerism than it actually is. Community service-learning entails careful structuring of a curriculum (even in a co-curricular or community-based program) that integrates service with the learning of new concepts and skills, and the community partner and teacher both need to have a vision of how to unify students’ service and learning through an organic, well-theorized pedagogy.

National CSL movement leadership rhetoric

An important aspect of CSL rhetoric is its rhetorical contexts and relationships, and these are influenced by the institutional location from which people speak and write about CSL, and the institutional bodies which are addressed by CSL rhetoric. Rhetoric plays a crucial role in forming new organizations or networks, building alliances between existing institutions, and shaping the involvement of units within an organization.

Currently in Canada, CACSL is acknowledging that universities tend to focus too much on the academic side of the partnership, and in treating it as student development issue they often place its administration in units that are not able to coordinate with related research and community engagement initiatives. The Alliance should not simply forge networks with institutions of higher education, but consider systems of recognition and commitment that enhance multi-sector “partnerships” wherever their centers are located.

On a national level, CACSL Alliance leaders must continue to acknowledge the slow and hard work of mutual engagement and collaboration within their own operations. Local programs will likely spend the bulk of their time focused on their own partnerships, and there is little time left to consider the benefits and responsibilities of belonging to national or international networks. There will always be a temptation to thin the commitment and reduce workloads,

but when taken too far, this demonstrates that the work is viewed as a load or burden rather than opportunity of mutual benefit. Mutual engagement that takes time and effort builds communities. This is true even at the national level, where representatives from all regions and institution types and roles must be mutually engaged with one another in order to foster the kind of belonging, imagination and allegiance that engenders learning.

The time and effort that high quality networks, partnerships, and alliances require to communicate needs to be acknowledged in planning and in relationships with funders. When consultations must involve people whose full time work is not focused on the CSL partnership, it will either take months or years of slow and thin communication that risks losing momentum, or it will require the cost of bringing people together through rich face-to-face conferences or technology. In this case, the old adage applies: "it can be quick, cheap or high quality, but you must pick only two." The CSL movement must choose quality, and this means the remaining choice is to have quality develop cheaply or quickly. It must develop slowly or in fits and starts where the resources for engagement are lacking.

Community sector rhetoric

CSL is a different form of social action than most community organizations are used to, so it often requires the creation of unique communication genres and processes. Organizations need appropriate rhetorical strategies 1) to confidently approach university programs and faculty members with their project and partnership ideas, 2) to collaborate with instructors to generate a student project description whose language invokes the course's goals as well as their own community needs, 3) to adapt a project to a course's academic schedule, 4) to talk to and guide students in an educational role as well as a supervisory one, and finally, 5) how to report on CSL partnerships and outcomes when writing reports to funding agencies. CSL may require the adoption of university genres such as research ethics application forms and consent forms, and the creation of hybrid genres that suit the unique needs of the partnerships.

Because CSL is different from and potentially more resource-intensive than volunteerism, the growth of a long term CSL partnership may require special targeted grant applications and the rewording of staff members' job descriptions. Community organizations may want to seek long-term collaborative research relationships with faculty members in management, communication, rhetoric and writing studies, and related fields to help them adapt their organization's communication structures and strategies. It would be most efficient if those researchers were also involved in teaching CSL courses involving student project partnerships the same organizations. Community organizations may benefit from workshops and the peer-to-peer networking and mentorship made available through university-based CSL program administrators and/or larger voluntary sector organizations like Chambers of Voluntary Organizations or branches of Volunteer Canada.

University sector CSL rhetoric

The major thrust of the University sector's CSL rhetoric should be on the integration of CSL within faculty members' and students' activities (including research and service), their identities and purpose, and their reward systems. It is important to value both curricular CSL delivered by faculty members and co-curricular CSL delivered through student services units. It is all too tempting for some institutions to give more leadership energy and money to co-curricular CSL because it is not as complicated as dealing with faculty members and the administration of academic programs and research.

Where CSL offices exist at universities, they can play valuable brokering or support roles. However, they should be cautious not to "help" too much and thus disempower, bureaucratize or micro-manage the teachers, organizers and students—let those responsible for delivery be the designers and leaders of CSL programming. They must not rely on a broker as an intermediary for their ongoing partnership communication; they must develop bonds of trust and mutual engagement. Brokers' choice to allow partners to communicate on their own involves the acceptance of some risk that partnerships may fail in some ways, or completely. Some space (and a degree of privacy) for failures is essential for experimentation and learning. Let partners also participate in communication that determines how support, recognition, evaluation and quality control is done through the center, and let any overarching system be flexible enough so that communication in these areas can be adapted to each partnership's needs. Create forums and structures for mentorship communication among new and experienced persons involved in CSL, since this is where the expertise and enthusiasm resides. Awareness of their expertise, accomplishments and vision is reinforced and renewed when they are communicated and modeled to newcomers.

Cushman makes the point that integration into universities has overlooked the link between service learning and the teacher's role as researcher. Research professors provide continuity and depth to service learning projects that students cannot since they cycle quickly through service-learning projects. She argues for the role of the service learning instructor as a key liaison and lead researcher in service-learning courses, guiding students into partnership by the example of her own immersion in both worlds of academia and community. Yet service learning must outlast not only the students but the researchers as well, since professors are also highly mobile and move from institution to institution. Therefore, she argues that several researchers, and not just one, need to share the relationships with the community that service-learning depends on at their institution.

Hessler and others recommend that the most sustainable means of advancing CSL is through "build[ing] upon the enthusiasm and successes of early adopters" who then speak and publish evidence that demonstrates to their peers in the academic discipline the rigor and success of this form of learning. However, in doing so, Hessler cautions us against setting up separate positions for service learning staff and "separate but equal" categories for evaluating service learning scholarship. Instead, Hessler says, the service of faculty members must be seen within

Ernest Boyer's framework of the scholarship of application, as something flowing directly out of one's special field of knowledge and one's research activities, and thus not separate from other measures of research productivity.

While promoting CSL within the university one must always be aware that university CSL rhetoric usually emphasizes benefits to academics and their disciplines, institutions, and students' learning more than the benefits and costs to the community. The rhetorical problem within the university is often framed as one of demonstrating relevance of one's discipline to students and the community while retaining or increasing the academic status and funding accorded to an individual, an academic unit, or an institution. Yet this inequality between academic and community-based status, expertise, and resources is primarily what CSL rhetoric is trying to address.

University CSL rhetoric must never forget to mention the considerable investment of expertise, knowledge, and time from CSL community partners and students, and the need to involve them actively in every process while building and managing a program. Community organization staff/volunteers and residents as well (where relevant) should have a voice in planning and evaluating a partnership. Undergraduate and graduate students should be encouraged to take leadership roles in CSL programs so that the student voice, values and perspective is considered.

For this reason I would recommend that local CSL partnership-brokering offices ideally exist outside of the university, with strategic oversight, funding and human resources provided equally by each major partner. This is currently the situation at Trent University, where it works very well. The external location will better enable it to treat various faculties and programs equally, and will prevent the CSL alliances from focusing too much on the university side of the partnership.

Partnership-forming and partnership-sustaining rhetoric, while it addresses the "win" to each partner, ultimately deemphasizes each actor's sectoral or institutional identities in order to emphasize their collective aims and values, using pronouns such as "we" and "our" rather than "it" and "they" to speak of the partnership as a real entity that each can identify as their own common initiative. Talk about "our" CSL center (for brokering partnerships and administering networks) and "our partnership" (for local partnerships among a teacher, community partner and students) as frequently as discussing the interests or requirements of a single partner, sector or role.

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