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Am I an equal partner? Community organizations’ perceptions of reciprocity in service-learning partnerships with Hong Kong universities

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Abstract

This quantitative study examined community organizations’ perceptions of reciprocity in service-learning partnerships with Hong Kong universities. Using a social exchange lens, it investigated perceived partnership parity and involvement in teaching and learning by adopting the Relationship Balance Assessment. Hong Kong’s higher education context was ideal because service-learning had been practiced for over a decade, yet little is known about the experiences of community organizations supporting this experiential pedagogy. The research questions were: What is the role of partnership parity on intention to commit to service-learning partnerships, and what is the role of involvement in teaching and learning on intention to commit to service-learning?

Of 262 survey responses, 69 were usable and analyzed using Qualtrics. Analyses included means, standard deviations, and chi-square tests. Two of the eleven partnership parity items and one of the six involvement in teaching and learning items were negatively correlated with commitment. Community organizations were less committed when they felt they asked universities more questions, remained silent when they disagreed with the university, or requested formal evaluation of students’ coursework. Results had limitations, but they provided evidence that a majority of community organizations were committed to service-learning partnerships and expected Hong Kong universities to take the lead. The findings inform knowledge and practice for universities seeking to sustain partnerships with community organizations for civic education.

Keywords: University-Community Organization Partnership, Experiential Learning, Partnership balance, Civic Education