

Proceedings - Roundtable on Experiential Learning / Community Engaged Learning

The University of Western Ontario
Friday 25 October 2019, 1:00 – 3:00pm

Hosted by:

Michael Buzzelli, Ph.D., M.Ed.
Western Teaching Fellow
Associate Professor of Geography
mbuzzel@uwo.ca

Leora Swartzman, Ph.D. C. Psych
Associate Professor of Psychology
Clinical Practicum Coordinator
lswartzm@uwo.ca

With report authorship assistance from Ebenezer Narh, Emmanuel Asafo-Adjei and Monica Dikkes

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Acknowledgements | 2 |
| 1. Introduction..... | 3 |
| 2. The ‘stuff’ of EL/CEL | 4 |
| 3. Best practices, lessons, models | 7 |
| 4. Concluding remarks | 9 |
| Meting visual/illustration notes by Monica Dikkes, Plates 1 and 2 | 10 |
| Appendix 1: Participant list..... | 12 |
| Appendix 2: Meeting plan - 25 October round table on EL/CEL @ Western..... | 13 |

1. Introduction

We are pleased to share the proceedings of the Experiential Learning/Community Engaged Learning (EL/CEL) roundtable meeting held at Western University on 25 October 2019.

As noted in the event invitation, Western's EL taskforce (see http://experience.uwo.ca/about/westerns_el_taskforce.html) defines EL as:

an approach that educators use to intentionally connect learners with practical experiences that include authentic and focused reflection. EL allows learners to: increase and apply disciplinary knowledge, develop transferable skills, clarify interests and values, strengthen employability, and collaborate meaningfully with communities.

For those with any experience in teaching and learning in higher education, you will recognise how fundamentally different our practice is when we (try to) achieve what is stated in this definition. For starters, this definition re-centres the locus of learning and knowledge outside the traditional classroom. It also values learning and skills that transcend disciplinary content. And finally, it regards learners as critical reflective practitioners in their own journey.

But before we delve into substantive issues, let us further frame the proceedings with a few points. The overarching aim of the roundtable was to draw on participants' interests and expertise in order to contribute to the development of EL/CEL. Participants were asked to consider the following questions before the meeting:

- What does it take to do community-engaged experiential learning well?
- How could it be done effectively and efficiently?
- What are the opportunities and challenges for faculty, students, programs and community partners?
- Can interested CEL colleagues share experiences, initiatives, expertise and/or resources?

A two-hour meeting is scarcely enough time to do justice to any one of these questions, let alone the full set. Our aim was to prompt discussion and let the experts carve a path based on their experiences, priorities and interests. And so they did.

We were deliberate about ensuring a mix of participants including staff/ faculty from Western, students and community partners whose roles are key to delivering the 'stuff' of EL/CEL (list of participants in Appendix 1). Further, the meeting focused on the community and the learner as 'the university' (that is, any university and indeed any higher education institution) seeks to further implement EL/CEL. We hope this report is useful to you.

2. The 'stuff' of EL/CEL

Our meeting kicked off with a lesson from the late actor Peter Sellers (see life lesson #7 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uiOG_nzNfzI) in his role as Inspector Jacques Clouseau trying to interrogate a small group of suspected criminals. The intent of this short video clip is to portray the untidy and difficult business of truth-finding, both for those participating in EL/CEL and those overseeing the journey.

In this spirit, prior to the meeting, one participant asked: "How can we best support the students? I was thinking that it might be helpful to develop a tip sheet for community agencies working with the students." With this we were on our way to placing the student and the learner at the heart of EL/CEL teaching and learning and recognising the qualitatively different roles played by community partners in delivering on the teaching and learning mission of the university.

The roundtable started off with introductions and a 'pair-share' exercise, which yielded a few noteworthy observations:

- EL/CEL courses allow partners to gain access to information and resources that they otherwise would not get
- We - - the university - - are in a traditional semester-based setting. This may differ from the work rhythms in the community. The difference can be a challenge for arranging and executing EL/CEL
- EL/CEL goals and objectives should be clearly articulated for all involved - - community partners, students and faculty/staff. If we want to do EL/CEL well, it is important for students to know what they are going to get out of the experience
- A value of EL/CEL is the applicability of what was worked on, and the engagement of students on practical projects. We want CEL to benefit the community and partners

The first main segment of the session (see Appendix 2 for the meeting agenda) consisted of small group discussions followed by plenary sharing. In addition to the bulleted roundtable questions above, participants were asked to bear in mind: what community partners understood of the mission and vision of EL/CEL; be mindful of resource needs; value relationships; see the process as equally important to outcomes; consider the legacy of the partnership; focus on learning while bearing in mind time and resource commitments; involve faculty more directly. With these additional prompts in mind, the meeting turned to the questions above, starting with

"What does it take to do CEL well?" Paraphrased responses included:

- The importance of open and ongoing communication

- That EL/CEL include a variety of learning opportunities (e.g. field trips, etc.,)
- Going beyond project/placement with a sole/specific partner
- That EL/CEL include and strive for more than academic benefits
- Understanding that it is a collaborative and mutually beneficial journey
- Recognise that in CEL the expectation is more than a placement but also about both learning and contributing to the work/mission of the partner
- Emphasis on partnership versus placement
- Early groundwork - - even at the secondary school level - - to prepare students for EL/CEL learning
- That all parties should have clear expectations including when assessment of student work/learning is needed
- Importance of students' understanding of the 'real-world' practical applicability of their EL/CEL work
- Importance of weaving together both academic and practical/transferable skills in building/running EL/CEL
- Supporting students throughout the process
- Preparing faculty to 'let go' during the EL/CEL journey, recognising not only the student's responsibility as the learner but also the community partner's role as co-educator
- Appreciate the benefit to the students of being engaged in work that builds new kinds of skills, that has a community impact and builds networks for them
- Recognise and learn to value and need and benefit of long-term relationships involved
- Be aware and prepare for how students connect and interact with community partners
- EL/CEL is about relationship-building that requires a recognition of the necessary boundaries involved (over such issues as roles, assessment, outputs)

To summarize, the main points that emerged from this discussion were that, *to do EL/CEL well*, we must cultivate long-term partnerships between faculty and community partners in which their complementary roles and responsibilities as co-educators are understood and valued. The importance of keeping the needs and constraints of the community settings top of mind was also recognized. And lastly, there was general agreement that, to do EL/CEL well, before students begin their work with the setting, they have to be sufficiently prepared with respect to expectations, requisite knowledge and skills, and recognizing understanding the real world applicability and hence the impact of their work

“How could CEL be done effectively and efficiently?”

- Students’ learning experience does not become the sole nor necessarily primary responsibility of the community partner in EL/CEL
- Given long-term relationships, recognise that there may be project transitions that involve continued engagement and time with clients/partners
- EL/CEL brings with it some of the same benefits as small class sizes such as being able to more fully connect with students and share mutual understandings of expectations
- The need to be clear about the partner/organisation, the clientele if applicable, familiarity with the workplace, boundaries and what is (un) acceptable in the workplace
- That it presents the student with a genuine opportunity to test a career path
- The challenges that partners/agencies may have in taking on students (notwithstanding good will)
- All involved in EL/CEL should be clear about prior knowledge and ‘base line’ competencies
- Learn and harness offering and appreciating professional development
- EL/CEL is a process of development, connecting students and partners
- That it is not always clear where to go for guidance, a question of institutional ‘centralisation’ versus dispersed leadership
- Expectation, preparing what CEL means to students and faculty and community partners
- Human resources – requires time and energy in developing relationships
- Finding the ‘right fit’ is important in developing and executing EL/CEL, and may require specific expertise
- Funding among other resources can be a challenge
- That it is important to clearly track progress in meaningful ways (e.g. the right indicators, metrics) and evaluate success and learn from challenges/mis-steps. Clear documentation on all fronts is important
- EL/CEL should not be a burden to community partners
- Partners will often have ideas for potential projects, a form of CSL – community service learning. Curricular design can be bi-directional
- EL/CEL projects can be flexible and cumulative such that cohorts of students can extend the life of a project across sessions/terms
- Debriefing is important for all parties including students for whom reflection is an intentional piece of EL/CEL
- EL/CEL has to be cognizant of diverse backgrounds of all involved (such as inter-cultural learning and competencies)
- EL/CEL is a new way to network faculty in their professional lives
- Relatedly, faculty may be hesitant but EL/CEL may be an opportunity to grow and diversity their scholarship/professional practice
- Different and new networks of professionals can be / are key, such as non-faculty

- Assessments need to be relevant to the EL/CEL work to ensure students are progressing well
- EL/CEL may involve long-range planning, even 2-3 years in advance of work
- Clarity is needed to differentiate students' 'course-based' work and what is 'EL/CEL'

To summarize, the main points emerging from the discussion about *doing EL/CEL effectively and efficiently* that did not also come up in the prior conversation about *doing EL/CEL well* were to invest the necessary resources (in faculty and staff time) up front and to track progress and outcomes to gauge success and learn from challenges. As well, maintaining clear documentation was thought to maximize efficiency by establishing institutional memory. And finally, efficiency could be realized if EL/CEL instruction was to double as an opportunity for faculty to develop professionally, network and expand their scholarship.

3. Best practices, lessons, models

After a brief break in the agenda the session reconvened with the subsequent questions on the floor. These questions again are: "What are the opportunities and challenges for faculty, students, programs and community partners?" and "Can interested CEL colleagues share experiences, initiatives, expertise and/or resources?" Inevitably, engaging discussion pushed the clock. With limited time the group added the challenge of thinking also about best practices, lessons and models.

Reflections on best practices included:

- Consider the ethical basis of the work being done in EL/CEL and work to ensure there is compliance when students undertake EL/CEL work that involves research or various forms of community partner 'organisational improvement'
- Ensure the partner / preceptor understands the value of EL/CEL to their own mission as well as the student's journey
- Offering partners / preceptors resources for professional development in exchange for their work in advancing the educative mission of the university
- Give thought beforehand and devote time to learning about all stakeholders' expectations (colloquially, something one participant referred to as 'professional speed dating')
- Communicating with partners that their work is indeed valued
- Similarly, for faculty, ensure that they are recognised for delivering a teaching practice that may be new and stands apart from other modalities
- Build in the time and resources, including personnel and funding if necessary, up front
- Also build in tracking of development, progress and outcomes for evaluation and refinement of EL/CEL

- Plan for debriefing for all parties to ‘close the loop’ on the process and outcomes

To summarize, one of the *best practices* suggested by the group (that had not come up in the prior discussions) was to communicate to community partners and faculty that their work is valued and to reward them accordingly (to the extent possible). As well it was acknowledged that those engaged in EL/CEL should be cognizant of ethical issues that could arise in the work being done for the community partners and of their responsibility to ensure that the projects comply with Western’s policy on Research Ethics and Integrity. And finally, implementing procedures/processes to ensure that faculty and community partners are on the same page (e.g. via an initial professional ‘speed dating’ session, a formal debriefing session) was deemed desirable.

Reflections on challenges, ‘what didn’t work’ and ‘hard lessons’ included:

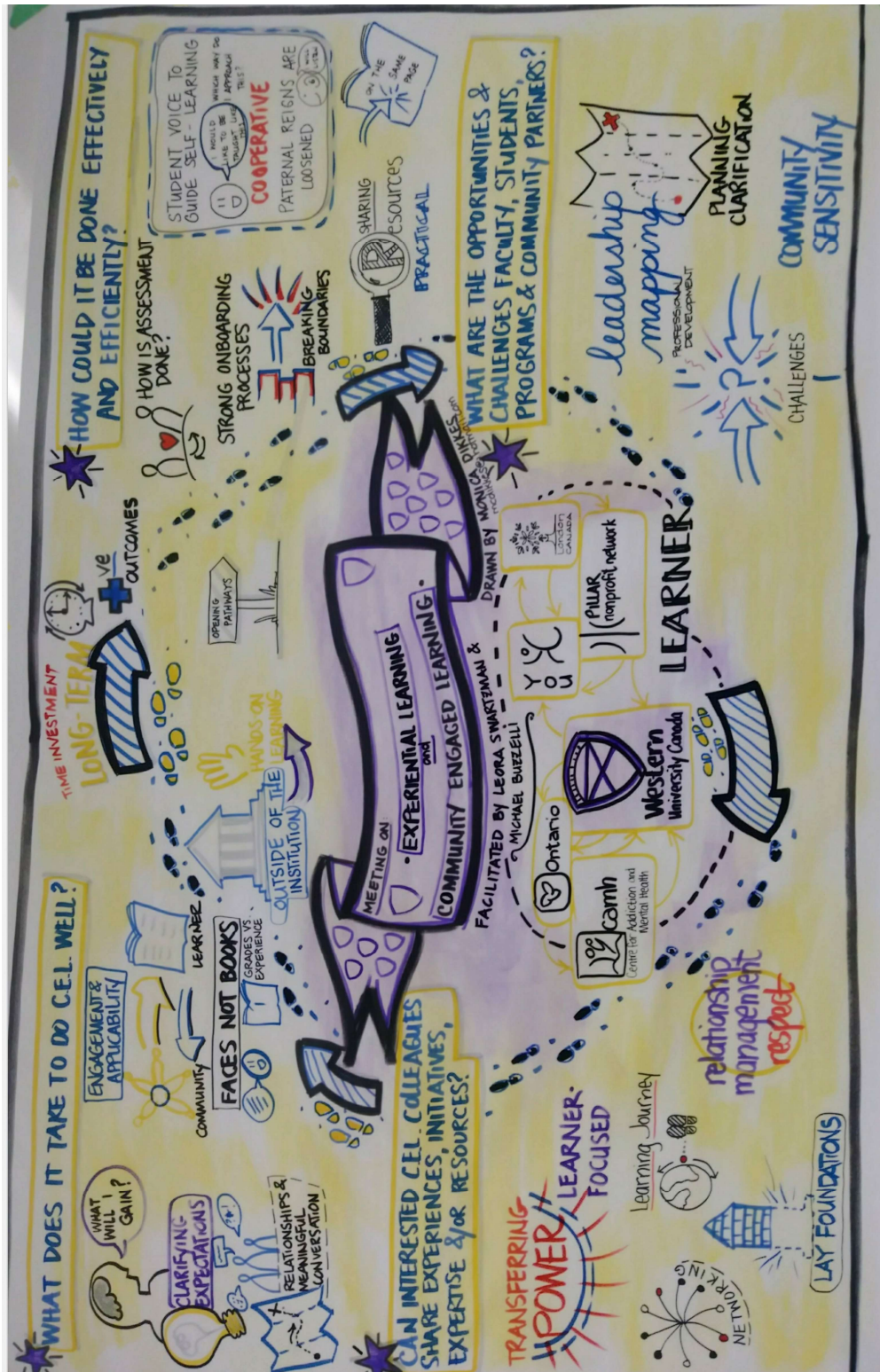
- As a teaching practice, developing a process is time intensive
- Managing new kinds of conflict that may arise is also outside of ‘normal teaching’
- In some instances, EL/CEL may ultimately be a burden on community partners
- Coordination at ‘the university’ may be difficult
- As noted earlier, funding and other forms of resourcing can be a challenge
- Project continuity between terms/session may be a goal but new groups can take projects in different, unanticipated and even unwanted directions
- Broadly, EL/CEL involves new power dynamics not part of more established teaching modalities
- Students may feel like they are simply assigned busy work. This should be avoided
- Projects may not seem relevant to community partners
- EL/CEL may feel like unpaid work, it may overlap with the work of staff in partner organisations and students may be viewed as ‘free labour’
- The institutional strain of EL/CEL becoming ‘universal’ and how this scale of activity could be coordinated and executed successfully
- How students are credited with EL/CEL experiences given their variety (e.g. nature and quantity of work, length of tenure, etc.,)
- The importance of the partner’s role in evaluating the student, but also recognising that while the partner should have a say in assessment, they should not be over-burdened with assessments that reach beyond their ability to provide feedback or ask too much of their time

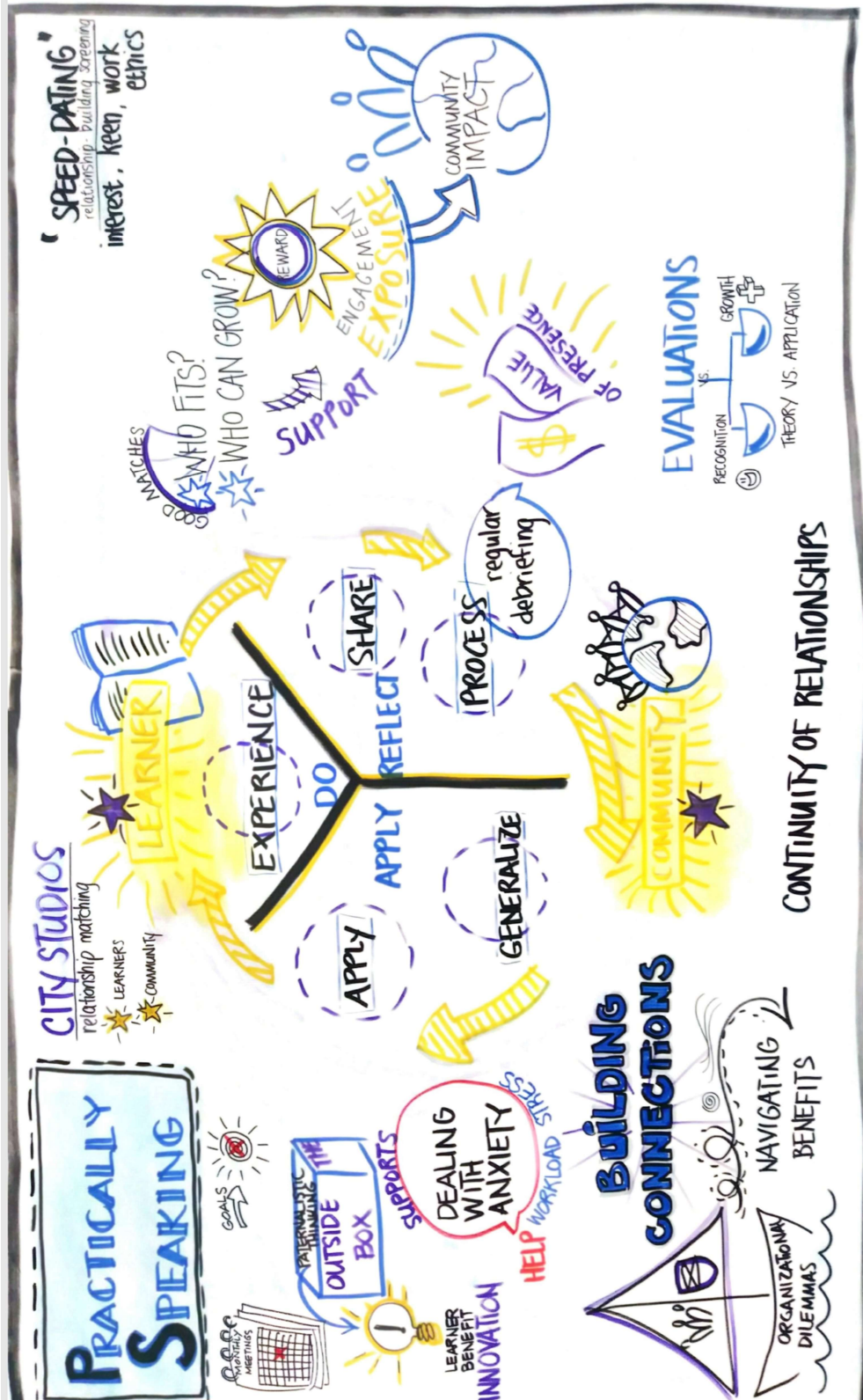
To summarize, one concern was recognizing the costs (to the university and community agencies) involved with doing CEL/EL well. How will we respond to external pressures to make

EL/CEL generally available without compromising the quality of instruction and placing an undue burden on the community and faculty instructors? The group also considered tensions that could arise, both on campus and in the settings, from blurred boundaries between students' work in the setting a 'learning' versus 'labour'.

4. Concluding remarks

We hope the above points will give you plenty to think about and act on in your professional practice. The visual learner will agree that there is perhaps no better way to bring this all together than with visuals like the wordle at the start of this document. Better still is the evocative artwork of Monica Dikkes, our roundtable visual rapporteur. The two plates on the following pages are structured around the meeting goal and objectives and our initial questions. And as with our notes above, the participants carved a path that meandered toward their interests and priorities. You can literally see this in drawn footsteps and other motifs. Notice the scale on plate 2 (bottom right) balancing recognition and growth via evaluation. We urge you to find your own favourite nooks.





Appendix 1: Participant list

Amy Lee, Director, Administration and Operations, YOU-Youth Opportunities Unlimited
Angela Meadows, Post-doctoral Fellow, Western
Britt O'Hagan, City Building and Design, City of London
Chris Circelli, Graduate Experiential Learning and Community Engaged Learning Coordinator,
Western University
David Walton, Professor, Physical Therapy, Western
Ebenezer Narh, Graduate student, Western
Emmanuel Asafo-Adjei, Graduate student, Western
Heather Wakely, Team Lead, Experiential Learning, Careers & Experience, Western
James Ridout, Student, Western
Jessica Kagal, Student, Western
Jon DeActis, Executive Director of the Center of Hope, London
Katelyn Harris, Research Ethics Officer, Western
Kayla Cooper, Student, Western
Kelly Hollingshead, Community Engaged Learning Coordinator, Western
Kinga Koltun, Supervisor, Policy & Strategic Issues, Neighbourhood & Community Initiatives,
Child and Fire Services, City of London
Leora Swartzman, Professor, Psychology, Western
Lori Hassal, Director, Crisis and Short Term Interventions at Canadian Mental Health
Association - Middlesex
Michael Buzzelli, Associate Professor, Geography, Western
Mischa Schlemmer, Manager, CityStudio London
Monica Dikkes, Professional Illustrator
Nanda Dimitrov, Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning, Western
Nicole Lobo, Western Alumna
Riley Hinson, Professor, Psychology, Western
Sandy Smeltzer, Professor, Faculty of Information and Media Studies, Western
Taylor Pratt, Student, Western

Appendix 2: Meeting plan - 25 October round table on EL/CEL @ Western

Friday 25 October 2019, 1:00 – 3:00pm, Social Science Centre room 1004, The University of Western Ontario.

Agenda

- A. Introductions (~20 mins.), including pair-share**
 - B. CEL/EL questions/issues/challenges (~35 mins), small group and plenary**
Invitation questions
 - What does it take to do community-engaged experiential learning well?
 - How could it be done effectively and efficiently?
 - What are the opportunities and challenges for faculty, students, programs and community partners?
 - Can interested CEL colleagues share experiences, initiatives, expertise and/or resources?
 - C. Intermezzo (~5 mins) with a bit of R&R - refresh and remix.**
 - D. Best practices, other models, hard lessons (~ 35 minutes), small group and plenary**
 - E. Closing (~15 mins). Summarise, main points, next steps???**
-

Different Worlds and Common Ground: Community Partners' Perspectives on Campus-Community Partnerships *

High-level points from some key sources

1. Pay attention to the CP's mission and vision.
2. Be mindful of CP's resources.
3. Value the relationships.
4. Regard the process as important (e.g., advance planning, maintain communication).
5. Consider the legacy of the partnership.
6. Decrease emphasis on tracking/counting hours and focus more on student learning.
7. Involve faculty more directly.

*Tinkler et al. (2014) Elements of effective service learning partnerships. *Journal of Service Learning*. 5(2), 137-152. and Sandy et al. (2006). Community partners' perspectives on campus-community partnerships. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*. Fall 2006 issue, 30-43.