Reciprocity is a tenet and a prerequisite of effective service-learning programs. As practitioners, we nurture mutuality by fostering respect and collaboration between community partners and service providers. We aim to generate meaning by effectively linking formal reflection and hands-on engagement. Interdependence between constituent elements is so important it is reflected in the hyphenated term itself: service-learning (Jacoby, 1996, p. 5). In the dialectical relationship between service and learning, each depends on the other. So, too, the actors are engaged in a dynamic, interdependent relationship.

Stanton (1990) argues that mindful focus on reciprocity is a key element elevating service-learning to a philosophy of education. More than a pedestrian mode of enriching the curriculum, it is a fundamental worldview:

an expression of values — service to others, community development and empowerment, reciprocal learning — which determines the purpose, nature and process of social and educational exchange between learners (students) and the people they serve, and between experiential education programs and the community organizations with which they work. (p. 67)

Jacoby (1996) adds, “Service-learning is therefore a philosophy of reciprocity, which implies a concerted effort to move from charity to justice, from service to the elimination of need” (p. 9). Reciprocal service-learning programs aim to offer a “hand-up,” rather than a simple “hand-out.”

This article seeks to contribute to the development of a transformative philosophy of service-learning. By presenting an indigenous Andean concept of reciprocity, or ayni (pronounced “eye-knee”), we aim to enrich our understanding of interdependent living in the global village. We offer this discussion of ayni as a metaphorical scaffold, building on the foundation of reciprocity laid through our international service-learning program. Documenting insights from the International Service-Learning Experience (ISLE) program, we offer eight applications of the concept as doorways to discuss the challenges of fostering mutual, meaningful (international) service-learning exchanges.

The Philosophy of Ayni

Ayni provides the substance to construct enduring relationships of reciprocity. Like the mud mortar that held our adobe schoolhouse together, it is both substantial and fluid. Both firm and flexible, once adobe is set in place it can weather grinding mountain storms, but must be habitually tended to maintain its integrity. As a guiding principle, ayni is a complex and challenging idea that prods us to ask hard questions of ourselves and our service partners. In the long term, ayni is resilient and applicable to a variety of relationships, including those we hope to build in the post-modern, post-colonial world. Ayni arises from an indigenous philosophy that stands the test of time, adapting to varied climates and surviving both conquest and capitalism.

The term ayni comes from the high terraces and craggy valleys of the majestic Andes Mountains. This is the home of the Quechua people, who, literally, were the backbone of the Inca Empire. Today they struggle both to integrate into evolving nation-states and to maintain traditional forms of community life. Family and community revolve around the
boom and bust cycles of agriculture, exports, and tourism. In most Andean countries, there is little government infrastructure to support health, education, or economic development beyond basic provisions. Eking out a living and building for the future, whether as an amaranth farmer, teacher, three-wheeled taxi driver, or chef at a tourist hotel means relying on others in hard times and coming together to provide for the common good. Ayni has long held together relatively autonomous community and kinship groups and helped them prosper and nurture a strong sense of interdependence.

Simply, ayni is the exchange of comparable work or goods as part of an ongoing cycle of reciprocity. People enter into an ayni relationship with another person, family, or ayllu (neighborhood or community) to accomplish more than one group alone could manage. It is a serious, if semi-formal, agreement entailing benefits, obligations, and fun for all involved (Albó, 1998; Gose, 1994; Mamani & Huamán, 1996; Pacheo, 1992). More like a covenant than a contract, an ayni relationship indicates a shared responsibility to respond to mutual obligations and responsibilities. It is not a narrow, creedal statement of orthodox communal doctrine, but a covenant to unite and explore the meaning of community. It is also a promise that all parties will benefit as they, working together for the common good, serve a greater purpose than individual self-interest.

In life, giving and receiving are seen as two sides of a coin; together they constitute an integral whole. This moral metaphor is built into the region’s everyday language. The term has evolved just as material culture has evolved; as a CD vendor in Quito so poignantly illustrated, the two, inseparable sides of a compact disc are also referred to as “ayni one” and “ayni two.”

A reciprocal relationship can be set into motion by min'k'a, an asymmetrical state when one party requests or receives help from another. The tension inherent in this relationship can be mediated by direct payment, or by entering into an ongoing understanding of ayni for an individual’s time, money, and/or labor (Allen, 1988; Isbell, 1978). In the former arrangement, wage laborers are considered appropriately compensated. In the latter, both parties anticipate continued exchanges, perhaps for an individual’s lifetime or longer.

Modes and terms for reciprocal exchanges vary depending on region, circumstance, and tradition (Sanabria, 1993). Often, the return of favors is specific and exact. For example, if I send my sons-in-law to plant blue potatoes on the high andene terraces, or our renowned panpipe band to your wedding, I can expect the same quantity and quality of labor from you when I inevitably need it. Candler (1993) notes that there is some ambiguity and flexibility built into ayni. It may also mean returning gifts of equivalent utility. For example, if I need my barn wall rebuilt and you need a water canal dug, we may agree to exchange equally valuable work. Ayni can range from lending a case of beer to accepting a public office (Albó, 1998, p. 27).

In this article we use this fullest sense of ayni, i.e., an exchange of equivalent value embedded in potentially long-lasting relationships. While some elements of ayni apply literally in understanding our service-learning program, many more can be best understood as a metaphorical extension of the principles of ayni. In preparing for our trip to Bolivia, we were conscious of reciprocity’s importance in both service-learning and Andean cultural exchanges. However, our experiences on site and thereafter motivated us to reflect more deeply on how an explicit emphasis on ayni-informed reciprocity could enhance our programs. It helps us place our offerings and ourselves in the larger context of service-learners on a global stage.

As a worldview and basis for social action, ayni is more than an equitable cycle of reciprocal giving. Understanding life itself as ayni places individuals in an ongoing relationship with the cosmos. Bolin (1998) shows how ayni provides the foundation for an intricate network of interdependent realms, from people to llamas, to lightning, to various mountain and sky deities. Respect for life and others starts with cooperation in the home, and expands in all social and spiritual relationships. Opportunities to demonstrate an understanding of ayni, whether in the blessing of a new household, honoring ancestors, or celebrating Carnival together must be approached with sincerity and care. These “gestures of generosity, reciprocity, and respect” (p. 58) are the means of integration into social life, of becoming a runa (adult or person). Gose (1994) records that ayni is as much a moral and cultural concept as an economic one. For Albó (1998), reciprocity through ayni is the foundation of humanity (p. 61).

The International Service-Learning Experience

The data for this research comes from our participation in, and analysis of, the ISLE. Sixteen undergraduate students and four coordinators joined forces in a service-learning course consisting of: 1) a seminar on the theory and practice of service-learning through the School of Education, 2) bi-weekly, individual reflective writing assignments which received several layers of feedback from the coordinators, 3) communal fund-raising, 4) meetings with professional volunteers and Andean scholars, 5) a series of
that ties

fun. Practice Spanish whenever possible. Get to

objectives:

that we generated as a group reflected our modest

intergenerational. (Quechua, Spanish, and English), interfaith, and

work team would be multi-national, tri-lingual

with local educators, activists, and residents. The

and engaging. We would be working hand-in-hand

building of what would become an adult education

revealed their priority on constructing the first adobe

local educators and grassroots community leaders

and expressed needs of local people, the regional col-

laborating organizations must be well-integrated into

the community, and the project could be accom-

plished in the very limited time available. Dr. Dan

Weiss of Amizade exceeded our expectations of a

grounded, yet visionary, partner. His discussions with

local educators and grassroots community leaders

revealed their priority on constructing the first adobe

building of what would become an adult education

complex. The labor promised to be muddy, physical,

and engaging. We would be working hand-in-hand

with local educators, activists, and residents. The

work team would be multi-national, tri-lingual

(Quechua, Spanish, and English), interfaith, and

intergenerational.

Our goals for the initial year were simple. The list

that we generated as a group reflected our modest

objectives: “Survive the trip. Build a school. Have

fun. Practice Spanish whenever possible. Get to

know ‘real Bolivians.’” What emerged from that first

year was considerably more than we anticipated. The

success of ISLE and subsequent iterations attest to

the momentum that can be generated when a cycle of

reciprocity is ethically established and continually

renewed.

Research Methods

The data that inform this article emerged from an

iterative series of qualitative, interpretive analyses.

They arise from ethnographic study that integrates

multiple modes of data collection, utilizes software-

assisted data analysis, and values reciprocal research

relationships.

Throughout the ISLE seminar, students were asked

to reflect deeply on core issues. We designed pre- and

post-spring break instruments to elicit personal, emo-
tional, and thoughtful responses. For example, we

asked students to write before, during, and after the

project on such issues as what it means to be a global

citizen, what they hoped to gain, and how their own

motivations to serve could be influenced by others

and the actual field project. Each essay received

feedback from at least two of the four course leaders

and we met biweekly as a teaching team to discuss

emerging issues, problems, and insights. During the

class we utilized their writings, arts-based projects,
group reports, and interactive games in order to build

on the initial ideas expressed in their individual

papers. As a leader and participant observer, Porter

took extensive field notes during all aspects of the

course and field project. In addition to student opin-

ions, we created systematic multimedia documenta-
tion of the experience through video, photos, and

leaders’ field journals. Finally, Porter conducted

videotaped interviews with non-governmental orga-

nization (NGO) and community leaders, local teach-

ers, and co-workers. These were then transcribed (in

part by native speakers) for complex coding and

analysis.

We utilized the NUD*IST qualitative data analysis

software in order to manage, interrogate, and assess

the data. We used a hierarchical model of categories

and iterative cycles of coding in order to systematic-

ally identify central and divergent trends. We started

with several core concerns, and added conceptual

nodes as meaningful new categories emerged. For

example, upon our return, two of the most pressing

issues students raised in the debriefing essays were

feeling like they had received more than they had

given, and sustaining the cycle of giving in North

America. This grounded approach helped us concep-
tualize the metaphorical framework of ayni that ties

together many of the students’ most significant areas

of concern and personal growth. When literature on

Quechuan ethics suggested additional foci, we

queried the data to see if students’ responses and

experiences addressed related ideas. The software

aided us in recognizing patterns, key words, relative

frequencies, and exemplary statements. We regularly

tested for inter-rater reliability in coding, comparing

strategies and definitions, and ultimately gaining a

great deal from the collective debate.

In addition to combining our efforts in data analy-

sis, we worked to involve multiple partners in the

composition of this article. We shared early drafts

with colleagues in the Andes as well as with Andean

scholars locally and received invaluable insights in

return. Porter met with many of the ISLE pioneers,

and conducted semi-structured, open-ended inter-

views with them to better understand the longer-term

impact of the program. Most have continued impres-

sive records of public service, which they directly tie

to their ISLE experience. The process of composing
and revising this article strengthened the bonds between ISLE leaders, organizational partners, and participants. And through publication we extend it to an even wider circle of critical friends; together may we work to sustain service-learning as an enterprise of caring, generosity, and reciprocity.

Applications of Ayni

This section presents eight aspects of ayni that emerged from our data. They invigorate central debates raised in literature about service-learning pedagogy and practice, raise questions about the challenges of fostering reciprocity among diversely situated citizens of the global village, and inspire us to design service-learning programs that bring together people across culture and geography in order to build more equitable, potentially transformative relationships of reciprocity.

First, service programs must be built upon a foundation of genuine need as expressed by the recipients. Second, ownership and responsibility for the project must be clear and shared. Third, real people must perform hands-on services; participants cannot buy their way out of personal obligations. Fourth, communal labor means strenuous physical engagement. Fifth, workers must come with an open heart and a generous spirit, as ayni exchanges cannot be performed begrudgingly or with a sour disposition. Sixth, ayni cycles involve a different conception of time, and place participants in an ongoing relationship that extends across both generation and geography. Seventh, the ayni exchange is equitable, with each side feeling that they received at least as much as they gave. Eighth, the “value” of reciprocal work cannot — and should not — be calculated in simple monetary terms.

1. The relationship springs from a genuine need and entails risks for both partners.

The cycle of reciprocity begins with the expressed needs of the host community. Jacoby (1996) notes that it is essential for service-learning programs to avoid “placing students into community settings based solely on desired student learning outcomes and providing services that do not meet actual needs or perpetuate a state of need rather than seeking and addressing the causes of need” (p. 7). Thus the foundation of a successful service-learning venture must be built upon the genuine needs of those who will live long-term with the outcomes of the service project.

The particular project we chose was part of our overall philosophy of responding to priorities that local community members set and projects they define. One of the greatest needs on the Bolivian altiplano is adult continuing education. This affects two main groups: campo residents wishing to gain skills and teachers needing to become fully certified. Local teachers shared with us the dire circumstances: in the countryside the average amount of schooling attained rarely exceeds third grade, and most have access to far less; adults, particularly women, need opportunities to relearn the literacy and numeric skills they may have acquired; finally, there is an urgent need to fully certify and support native teachers who will work in the region’s schools.

She also spoke passionately of access ultimately as a fundamental human right, emphasizing, “What we are trying to get across is that each person has the power, the human right if you will, to better themselves, to better their community.”

Grassroots activists already identified two NGOs — Centro Educativo, Technico, Humanistico y Agropecuario (CETHA) and the Foundation for Integral Development in Bolivia (FUNDESIB) — with solid reputations in the region to develop and offer culturally-appropriate models of teacher recruitment and continuing education. Local instructors taught via modules broadcasted on the Radio Bahá’í’s weekly programs. What they needed to complete the program was a campus where the teachers could finish their certification and adult students could meet. Deane Genge, FUNDESIB’s secretary of the Board of Directors, noted that a residential campus offering intensive weekend courses would “allow individuals who could not go to a fixed schedule program to come here and gain a high school education.” The NGOs in turn contacted Amizade to coordinate service-learning partners to help make the building project a reality. Although we discovered their needs through these advocates, once on site we worked directly with the native teacher candidates, local educators, Radio Bahá’í personnel, and residents. Dan Weiss of Amizade was a constant coordinating presence, and NGO partner representatives came to encourage and explain the quality pedagogical programs they supported. Thus we had ample opportunities to talk face-to-face with direct beneficiaries of
the many constituency groups.

One purpose in frequently engaging in personalized discussions about the need for the teacher training and adult education center was to better understand the significance this center held for local residents. As a result, ISLE students were able to articulate the long-term importance of the project. Brad reflected his confidence that the school was a solid project that may have long-term consequences:

The fact that we built a school that will be utilized for continued education is quite a contribution. We gave something to these people that will last longer than any contribution of food or clothing. We have started the ball rolling to what can be a lifetime of successes and better qualities of lives for the people of the area. This was a building that was absolutely necessary to the continued progress of these people. If they do not have the tools to succeed, we very well can’t expect them to do so.

Our major contribution was not coming to do a project for them. Rather, it was serving as a catalyst of energy, materials, and organizational skills for local people to see their own plans come to fruition in a timely and substantial manner. By assisting programs that are indigenously defined and run, we reinforce rather than undermine their capacity for sustainable development.

What one asks for is part of the equation. How that request is framed is equally significant. Exploring the politics of asking for help reveals useful features of using an ayni framework. Expressing need can be difficult. Requesting assistance from a subordinate position entails subservience and acquiescence to the demands of the patron or giver. When a family initiates mink’a, they need to be clear about what would motivate others to respond to them. Are they expecting “pay” the workers for their trouble, with food, smiles, or money? If so, they are only reinforcing their position as subordinates who bargain from a position of disadvantage. Even though they have rewards to offer, they must continually negotiate with their benefactors. Contracts must quantify and regulate expected services, cheapening both their request and what is given. Further, their “plea” for assistance reinforces the inherent inequities between employer-employee/patron-beneficiary, putting them in the unenviable position of having to continually motivate others to come to their aid (Harman, 1987, p. 118).

In contrast, requests for ayni spring from a different source and can be approached in a different manner. During the often highly formalized ayni requests, invitees and sponsors sit down over food and chicha (fermented corn beer) and propose starting an equitable exchange. Requests must be subtle and open-ended, freeing the giver to respond in a way deemed appropriate and generous. During extended fieldwork in the Andes, Candler (1993) learned that “the art of reciprocity is not to state, in explicit detail, what is expected or hoped for, but rather to communicate it indirectly” (p. 184). Certainly, ayni askers can be quite flattering, providing hints, expressing hopes, and putting the request into perspective. Each partner is free to accept, reject, or redefine the relationship. Because both sides invoke the ayni code, which is greater than either partner, such a request must be offered, and accepted, with thoughtfulness.

This mode of initiating contact accomplishes two important goals. First, both parties are establishing a relationship, not negotiating a short-term contract. It is expected that they will be establishing a potentially long-lasting cycle, both sharing responsibility for its success. Each iteration of exchange, or gift-giving, takes prior generosity or stinginess into account. A dynamic series of encounters is set into motion, one where “the inherent asymmetry and play of sentiment in the exchange is also calculated, intended to encourage the possibility of future exchanges and deepening bonds of goodwill and benevolence” (Candler, 1993, p. 220). The result is that future repayment requests are straightforward, for the relationship preexists the request. Sponsors simply state the time and place (Mamani & Huamán, 1996).

Second, rather than reinforcing dependence, ayni exchanges highlight the power that both givers and receivers hold relative to one another. Instead of pitiable, the initiators are generous, as they must inevitably return the favors requested. They also gain power by accepting the burden and responsibility of reciprocating, thereby showing their own faith and good intentions to maintain the relationship. By accepting the school, the local teacher candidates and teacher educators pledged their commitment to use the resource to train others and spread the wealth. The FUNDESIB representative emphasized the catalytic role these educational programs would have in sparking change throughout the region:

The teaching credential program primarily focuses on social and economic development. [Participants’] educations will help them become agents of social transformation in the rural communities. They’ll be the most highly educated person in the community they serve.

The goal was to instill not only solid pedagogical skills, but also to help teachers see themselves as people who now could, and should, give back to the communities that sponsored their education and offered them a current position. In this way they would continue the cycle of expanding interdependence.

In summary, initiating the service-learning partner-
ship is the first critical act that sets the tone for subsequent exchanges. In our own work, we need to make sure that the partnership springs from a genuine need defined by the receiver. We need to be aware of the risks and responsibilities facing each partner when they reach out to one another. Each needs to retain dignity and a sense of competence. Ayni exchanges are a serious business, keeping participants mindful of the ongoing debts of obligation incurred if they offer—or accept—assistance. We would do well to likewise consider which project requests we wish to accept, and the community groups with whom we would like to partner. We need to be mindful of how we depend on and cultivate each other’s unique skills and resources. Sustainable partnerships cannot begin and end with quantified, contractual payoffs. We need to build in trust and flexibility, so that personalized acts of generosity can come into play. We need to approach one another with hope and clear expectations. Our acts have lasting implications, not only for our own credibility, but for the viability of potential partnerships that come after us.

2. Growing networks of stakeholders share ownership of the project.

Ayni creates “firm, inescapable commitments” between partners (Harman, 1987, pp. 116-117). As the relationship grows, so do the number and kind of stakeholders who are brought into meaningful relationships with the core groups. One of the major issues that can grow out of the initial request is identifying the legitimate stakeholders and what they can expect from involvement in the exchange. This section explores varying forms of ownership and participation.

Most ayni is performed by a particular group on behalf of another particular group. Ayni assumes that the beneficiary and the benefactors are both well delineated; in this way, participants can more easily determine who “owes” what to whom. On the surface, the formal partners in ISLE seemed clear: students; adults seeking a high school education, teacher candidates seeking full certification, and local campesino/as attending short agricultural and health courses; regional activists and educators who would see their goals to expand the courses realized, the young sheepherders and older neighbors ventured closer and closer to our odd, mixed labor crew and we welcomed their questions and curiosity. We, along with our more fluent coworkers, conveyed that the goal of the complex was to provide a resource for diverse students from the surrounding region. Although the sponsors would have primary responsibility for upkeep and staffing, it was to become a public resource, and not the exclusive property of particular institutions.

At home, too, we had our sponsors and curious spectators to please. As ISLE gained recognition, the University wanted to know who would “own” the initiative. They asked: Who would benefit from this new kind of international travel and study? Who could participate? What would they learn? We needed to secure the approval and also the institutional support to enhance the infrastructure that would sustain ISLE and related programs over time. Through explicit attention to this need, the network of stakeholders grew tremendously within the first year of this experimental program. Recently, the newest iteration was awarded the prestigious Provost’s Innovation in Teaching Award.

Just as the formal partners were not the only beneficiaries, the public actors were not the only ones essential to the project’s success. Each team needed numerous support personnel and colleagues to create a full, satisfying experience deemed worthy of the necessary efforts. The Andean case provides a good illustration of how this is traditionally orchestrated. Gose (1994) notes that although ayni is often calculated by the quantity of work-days exchanged among men, the prerequisite “is actually the provision of corn beer by women that is crucial to recruiting a work party at this time of the year, and not the accumulation of labour [sic] credits in an exchange system” (p. 226). Nurturing a relationship is about creating a fun atmosphere, throwing a good party, mobilizing a network of collaborators. This is particularly apparent when resources are scarce and the rewards of doing more work are tentative. Zesty, thirst-quenching chicha (corn beer) is the result of long weeks of harvesting, fermenting, and brewing. Having it ready for workers demonstrates anticipated
success and appreciation for energy and time expended. We all enjoyed the fiesta that marked our last night. It was a joyous, musical celebration where we met more of the wives and children of our mostly male Bolivian coworkers, sampled chicha, tasted food obviously prepared with care and generosity, and made plans for the University of Pittsburgh’s and Amizade’s continued commitments to working in the area.

The result of creating interconnected webs of stakeholders is they understand the project and each feels a legitimate, shared stake in its success. They share the benefits of creating a public resource, and participate when a particular constituency does well. Some members of the larger network play formal and public roles, others play equally important informal and personal roles. Thus over the long term, when it is one party’s turn to act, they know there is a cadre of support personnel ready to make possible their continued participation.

3. Service means lending a hand, not just writing a check.

Reciprocity based in ayni keeps cycles of interdependence to a human scale; individual service and personalized gifts have currency. Unlike contractual labor relationships where participants are monetarily compensated, or familial labor where no tally is kept, reciprocal labor involves a “debt” which is understood and recorded in human terms (Sanabria, 1989, p. 229). In the strictest sense, when it is your turn to serve, you cannot pay someone else to do your part. The obligation must be returned through personalized giving. Humanly manageable scales keep ayni (or service-learning) exchanges from spiraling out of control. Indeed, maintaining a vital system of ayni parallel to the wage economy is one of the foundations for Quechuan cultural survival. As Allen (1988) notes, “[Quechuan] rejection of money is a refusal to bypass human reciprocity” (p.219).

When possible, Indigenous Andeans strongly prefer ayni labor to wage labor, for it strengthens the quality and quantity of their household’s resource base in ways that cash cannot. First, work in ayni is often preferred because those with a shared stake in the outcome are more likely to provide better quality work. Spedding (1997) summarizes that at harvest time, owners usually prefer to engage ayni workers, because they “are considered to take more care and treat the coca as if it were their own, because they hope that their ayni partners will do the same for them” (p. 62). When service-learning programs offer participants the opportunity to gain something rather than just charitably giving, they see the work as part of their own lives, rather than a task to be endured solely for someone else’s benefit.

Second, accumulating ayni bonds creates shared wealth. Isbell (1978) tells the story of a man considered apu (rich) in both material wealth and his large network of kin who could be relied on to perform ayni for those in his network. She contrasts him with a similarly financially well-off person, but who had made few personal ties connecting him to the community. This man was pitied as wakcha (poor) or orphaned. Simply having had enough money to hire workers would not have established the reciprocal relationships necessary to truly belong to the local community. In many ways our North American students were like the pitied wakcha man. Most had relatively large financial resources, but still they felt adrift in the global village. They joined ISLE to create meaningful, reciprocal relationships to feel like needed members of a global family.

This underlying motivation to create relationships came to the fore when ISLE participants were challenged by peers and parents to justify why they were spending money to go down in person. The sum of the per-person costs for travel, room, and board could indeed have been used to hire local workers. Kristi summarized the dilemma, “People have teased me about this trip, saying that we could have just given our fund-raised money to the Bolivians and not have gone at all.” After the trip she responded, “Yes, this may have provided them with more funds, but I think our going there had an even bigger impact.”

Personally serving helped create sustainable wealth in the Bolivian community in another way. Our commitment to work with Amizade provided the catalytic elements of funds, labor, and focus that made the education center a possibility then and there. Certainly, there is no dearth of skilled labor in the region, but our material, physical, and moral support made the project actually come together. Those who came to work with us during our compressed Alternative Spring Break learned to mobilize community members, organize building materials, and coordinate regional NGOs. Those skills will be useful in subsequent projects that they (and we) now have increased confidence to assume.

In summary, following through on commitments to come in person is essential to maintaining ayni as a human scale system. Forging personal connections provides the means to pool external and internal resources, link cultural groups, and strengthen institutions. A community can only prosper if each person feels their contributions are both necessary and significant, and are part of one global village. In ayni-based service-learning, partners put their reputations, emotions, and physical selves on the line.

4. Physical labor is an important part of the mix. Communal work means strenuous, physical
engagement with one’s whole body. Being fully present means giving with all of one’s strength. It is not a coincidence that the title of this article draws on many metaphorical layers of the word “building.” Although there are countless forms of valuable community service, we found that the physicality of our project highlighted important lessons that might otherwise have been harder to experience. As Sr. Atapa, a community leader and educator, remarked when visiting the building site, the very school itself embodies sacrifice: “We believe that every drop of blood or tear that is mixed into the adobe makes it stronger. Because this school was built of love, it will persevere against the elements.” We came to understand just how important this transfer of energy was to the success of our communal work.

The building project required a significant investment of energy. Indigenous Andean worldview ascribes ayni with the power to vigorously redistribute vital forces in a way that maintains the health and well-being of the community. “Reciprocity is like a pump at the heart of Andean life,” writes Allen (1988). “The constant give-and-take of ayni and mink’a maintains a flow of energy throughout the ayllu” (p. 93). Our students wrote of finding untapped strengths within, reaching deeply to heave adobes or to keep stirring the barro (mortar) so that it would not dry out. Rachel wrote:

> I found things within myself while working on the project that I thought did not exist. An example of this is strength and stamina. In past experiences when things get too hard, I just quit, but I did not want to quit, I wanted to keep going. I really feel that I helped build that school building. It is the first thing that I have ever built and I enjoyed it. I loved going to the site each day knowing that I would be walking home a lot dirtier, but with a feeling of satisfaction.

Finding the needed inner strength and then passing it on to others and to the building was not an easy task. But participants found a good day’s work enhanced well-being on many levels.

The physical labor represented a real departure from seat-learning. For some, it also meant working hard and venturing to pull their own weight. Jen, a freshman, who wrote of feeling “upset that I have never really done much for myself” and that she “never had to do much work,” was concerned about how she would fare in the service-learning course. After our return she reflected:

> While I have done a lot of volunteer work in the past, the hardest work that I have ever done was in Bolivia. I learned what it felt like to really accomplish something of my own. I learned to push myself to achieve an end goal and when we did achieve that goal, the feeling was indescribable.

They learned that they were valuable, needed members of a larger community, and that they did have the strength to make a difference.

Finally, we should not underestimate the importance of having a tangible result in students’ assessment that they accomplished something “real.” For example, seeing a planted, thriving quinoa field or new alpaca corral in use by the neighbors, Sara wrote, “the best part about volunteering by building something is that you can see concrete results when you are done.”

Analysis of ISLE reveals the physical elements of service can provide critical modes of learning. Just as the same intricately woven cloth is used to harvest coca leaves — to carry them to the shrine to be blessed and reenergized, and to bring back souvenir flowers — the body is at once vessel, ambassador, and means of transformative action (Bastien, 1978, p. 79). Physical sacrifice is part of the gift of life energy that is shared with others. It is the means of finding strength within, and energizing the community through giving. In this project, blood, sweat, and laughter fell to the earth to be mixed with water and recycled into adobes. These in turn became part of the tangible edifice we left behind as a monument of our time together.

5. Giving must be done joyfully and wholeheartedly.

Giving with the body is complemented by giving from the heart. Being fully present means giving in a sincere and genuine way, thus being receptive to others’ gifts in turn. Noddings’ (1984) understanding of receptivity is particularly poignant, revealing openness to what others have to give as a prerequisite to being able to embrace the other in a caring, responsive way. It does not mean accepting only those aspects we wish to receive or that easily agree with our own culture, but rather accepting lessons from cross-cultural encounters with an open stance and sincere desire to comprehend. Bolin (1998) notes that one of the most important elements of an offering of ayni is the mindset with which it is given and received. She found that Andean peoples believe that service, if rendered with joyful, peaceable, and patient hearts, will be rewarded in generous measure.

Students were challenged to give of their best selves during the seminar and especially during the field project. Notably, when asked in debriefing essays what they felt was their most important contribution to the project, participants’ most frequently responded “my self.” For some this meant “trying to stay happy,” showing “sensitivity to people’s illness,” being “open-minded and flexible.” They agreed with...
relationships are voluntary which are done ceremonially and can be broken off at any point by either party. They learned that sometimes seemingly small acts of kindness or generosity can significantly contribute to senses of membership and connection (Porter & Rapoport, 2001).

Keeping an eye on giving reminds all of us of the importance of simple gifts. They go a long way in creating a shared sense of being one community (Porter & Jendry, 2000). Sleeping on straw mats on a cold floor, sharing constantly malfunctioning toilets, doing without plumbing or heated water all added to participants’ understandings of our community partners. Lifting one another’s burdens (whether this meant jointly hoisting an adobe to the top of the wall or discussing the guilt we felt about economic disparities between ourselves and our hosts) helped us overcome the individualism and isolation that otherwise too often characterizes North American culture. Since we lived at the Bahá’í Radio compound and constantly played basketball, debated, walked to the worksite, and labored with local residents, we had many opportunities to give and receive, both within our group and between ourselves and our new partners.

Givers are not the only ones who must approach the exchange positively. When it is their turn to receive workers, hosts have to lay a generous table of food and drink and provide a fun and celebratory atmosphere. After all, ayní relationships are voluntary and can be broken off at any point by either party (Harman, 1987). An ungrateful host or a begrudging guest can sour the punch (or chicha). Condori Mamani and Quispe Huamán (1996) note that mutuality is what transforms a free party into a potentially lasting partnership.

When you swap ayní favors, you have to put your heart into it, and when they come help you, you’ve got to treat them right. If there isn’t any warmth in your house, few people will come help you, because some villagers go work in the fields just so they can drink cornbeer and liquor. (p.44)

In summary, ayní is more than a point system. As a philosophy of service it provides the means to learn to become human within community. “It is not possible to understand Andean life outside of ayní,” concludes Apfel-Marglin (1998). “Life itself is ayní. The invitation, the very activity and the thanksgiving are all moments in the ayní which are done ceremonially and with great joy” (p. 108). Let us think of service-learning not as a dull series of tasks that need to be done, but as the means of giving and living joy.

6. Preconceptions about time need to be checked at the door

Thinking about reciprocity in terms of ayní challenges us to think in expansive ways about time that crosses generation and space. Western metaphorical conceptualizations about time often limit how we think and talk about it. In U.S. mainstream culture, time is a scarce commodity to be saved, spent, or wasted. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) point out, this conceptualization of time casts it as something valuable, fleeting, and unrecoverable. In order to participate in ayní, givers must sacrifice time that could otherwise be spent on their own activities. Students’ repeated emphasis on donating their time to ISLE illustrated initial preoccupations with what they were sacrificing. Before departing, students often wrote about “giving up” one of their Spring Breaks.

After the trip we continued to meet as a seminar. Students’ descriptions of their experience shifted. They no longer talked about time as a material good they had to relinquish, but something they could choose to give as a personal and meaningful gift. They began talking about time as an “investment” both in themselves and for their friends in Bolivia. Rachel talked about her enhanced self-worth that came with this shift:

By helping others, I was helping myself because now I can feel good about my accomplishments during the week. Not many people get a chance to go to another country and work on a project like I did for spring break. Many people do not even know where Bolivia is, let alone care about the people who live there… By going to Bolivia, I gave other people the chance to learn and by learning, a chance to better their lives — even though I was working, I still got a much needed break and a chance to be in the sun. I feel that I helped to make a difference with my week instead of going to the beach and indulging myself.

When viewed as part of an ongoing exchange, instead of being transient, time becomes transferable. Instead of being irretrievable, time becomes cyclical. The experience of looking up and seeing the Southern Cross and the Milky Way sparkle with a brilliance unknown to those raised within Pittsburgh’s city lights was awe-inspiring. Several participants mentioned that taking time to simply look up at the southern sky literally turned their world upside down. Erica reflected longingly in her field diary, “It was so peaceful. I realize how much we take for granted. Life isn’t as complicated as most
of us make it out to be. I wish there were a place in Pittsburgh where I could go and look at the stars. Pittsburgh is lacking the peacefulness that Bolivia has; I’m going to miss this so much when I get back.”

Our _ayni_ labor party provided the opportunity to work alongside and with others in a focused environment. Immersing oneself in the rhythm of mixing mud, laying adobes, awakening with dawn, and chatting with others in the long pauses between the work set new tempos/melodies with which students learned to harmonize. The opportunity to focus by stepping out of the paperwork shuffle of graduate school applications and hectic planning for summer was particularly valuable for one of the seniors. Jasmine commented, “This trip has made me realize I had to slow down. It gave me better things to think about. It made me realize that I have to be conscious of other things as well as what is going on in my own life.”

Explicitly setting aside time to look beyond their normal horizons helped students step out of their usual time and place parameters while we were abroad. Even the brief Alternative Spring Break format helped push back boundaries. It helped students grasp the Andean cosmology underlying the _ayni_ philosophy. The relationship of humans to the cosmos is “a sentiment, a way of being situated in the world, a way in which to understand a conceptualized life” (Salazar & Salazar, 1996, p. 52.) It means being an integral part of the never-ending, reciprocating cycle of life, death, and gift-giving.

Placing service-learning in a larger, even cosmic, framework allows us to think about the (very) long-term consequences and rewards of establishing reciprocal relationships with our students and community partners. Real _ayni_ is patient. Having this kind of patience is a real challenge in a U.S. institution of higher education, where deadlines to demonstrate results are more likely to be tied to arbitrary fiscal years and grading periods than to the ebb and flow of emerging institutional-community-sponsor relationships.

7. _The exchange needs to be equitable._

 _Ayni_ is built upon a “symmetric and egalitarian relationship” between households, communities, and extended families willing to rely on one another (Gose, 1994, p. 8). Gugerty and Swezey (1996) warn that before effective, reciprocal service programs can grow, the seeds of trust, mutual ownership, and commitment must be sown. Both the institution and the community need to sincerely believe they have something to contribute and gain through the relationship. Only then can power and status differences be bridged. In _ayni_, each is seen as having unique needs as well as resources. Partners are different enough to have something to offer one another, but not so foreign or different in status that they cannot bridge cultural or socio-economic divides. Because both sides give and receive, reciprocal _ayni_ partnerships can foster senses of equity and solidarity.

This is an important lesson for those of us living in Western, capitalist cultures which too often operate within a zero-sum mentality. Rather than diminishing our resource base by giving to others, we are actually enriching ourselves as people and adding to the shared resource base that we could draw upon in the future. Through (international) service-learning we are widening our circle of allies, removing cultural blinders about how the world works, and creating communal goods. Furthermore, the philosophy of _ayni_ presents a counter-discourse for Western unidirectional concepts of “development” and “aid.” Apffel-Marglin (1998) critiques development as “an activity done by someone called a subject and that acts on an object-_chacra_ in order to transform it according to its own will” (p. 107). Andean relationships grounded in _ayni_ shift the metaphor to an ongoing “conversation,” an exchange between respected and powerful partners, each of whom benefits equitably. We become partners rather than patrons and debtors.

As posited earlier, partners need not exchange exactly the same thing. Rather, a core test of _ayni_’s success is that those providing labor feel they receive at least as much as they give. Suzan talked about this balance:

> The more and more I worked I realized that if we had … not actually worked side-by-side with the Bolivians it would have been a totally different experience. They showed us what Bolivia was about. I think we all learned something from each other.

Nearly all the participants felt that they came away with much more than they gave.

Solidarity can also be an outcome of reciprocal relationships. Working together to create something of value can help cultivate a shared sense of identity (Gose, 1994, p. 9). When _ayni_ work parties gather, the participants simultaneously represent their own constituencies and form a new polity, a community that is larger than any one segment of the _ayllu_ (community or family). As Matt wrote, his “family” grew:

> After experiencing everything that we did, I think that it will be hard not to feel that we belong to something bigger than just the University of Pittsburgh, ISLE, or even the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, or even the United States of America, we belong as citizens of the world. Nationalism has found a way to
make people proud of only their country and
want to make amends within this realm only. It
neglects helping those who are our brothers and
sisters, our mothers and fathers and only helps
those who biologically fill these roles.

Situating themselves meaningfully as legitimate
members of a global family was an important out-
come for ISLE.

In ayni relationships, contributors add a little more
to the community chest every time they engage in
community service. Each partner gives back not only
in proportion to what they receive, but is motivated to
give a little more. Harman (1987) notes that “loans”
of ayni typically accrue no formal interest (p. 120).
Albó (1998), however, points out that the expectation
of an incremental return chosen by the giver is often
anticipated, and may even be specified in the original
“contract” between parties (p. 28). Explicitly stated
or not, it is traditional in ayni to give back a little
more than you receive. Return five bottles of beer
with a sixth; send your oldest son to work rather than
the weaker, younger one; do a little more than you
have to. This extra gift, the yapa, demonstrates the
generosity and goodwill arising from the original
gift. In this way the yapa underscores how ayni is situ-
ated between loan and gift, favor and obligation. It
underscores the potential for transformative growth
within community.

We should design service projects so that each
partner comes away feeling that he or she received
the better end of the deal, that they received more
than they gave. We should also be mindful of the “lit-
tle things” keeping the cycles going: that extra thank-
you, the added effort to clean up after working, the
plan for a reunion, the yapa. Albó (1998) adds that
this cycle of giving connects humans and the cosmos
in a web of well-being:

It starts with the couple, the human foundation,
and it expands to all other social and human rela-
tionships in this world and also with the power-
ful being of the higher- and under-worlds... The
ideal goal in this system of relationships is not a
static equilibrium but a growth through the
dynamics of the gift: to give always more than is
received. (p. 61)

Ayni is a dynamic system. Reciprocity through ayni
thus provides an energized means to counter the sta-
tus quo and achieve social transformation.

8. The net “value” of the service-learning rela-
tionship is a complex equation.

The “value” of reciprocal work cannot be calcu-
lated in simple quantitative or monetary terms. A
defining feature of ayni is that it does not, and
should not, involve primarily financial compensa-
tion. This would cheapen the value of the relation-
ships otherwise established. In a parallel argument,
Cantor (1995) warns that being paid could under-
mine the learning value of a community service expe-
rience (p. 90).

The complexity of ayni is reflected in Andean
scholars’ ambivalence about whether to translate
ayni as a “loan” of labor between affiliated groups.
This Western concept maps well onto the Andean
topography by delineating relative positions,
degrees of distance and obligation, and the semi-
formality of the relationship. Yet this linguistic tool
falls short. Apffel-Marglin (1998) critiques the for-
gn notion of reducing ayni to a “loan.” Instead of
being a contract, she sees it as both a substance and
a way of being that is put into circulation. It is the
life force that has must be re-created daily for life
itself to continue (pp. 107-108).

Thinking about service-learning in terms of ayni
requires a shift in both language and practice. We
need to move from focusing on whether student-
clients “got their money’s worth” to what they
“invested.” Moving completely beyond market econ-
omy-constrained terms to new understandings of the
“value” of the “gift” of service would be better still.
Reciprocity has power precisely because it is not
simple turn-taking. It is not part of an accounting sys-
tem where accrued benefits and debts are quantified,
tallied, and quickly counter-balanced. Ayni workers
suspend immediate payment, expecting reciprocal
assistance sometime in the future, in some meaning-
ful form yet to be determined (Bastien, 1978, p. 108).
It is the basis for relationships that evolve over time,
engages increasing networks of interdependent
groups, and involves personal sacrifice and commit-
ments. Ayni requires trust and responsiveness, and
courages action grounded in care rather than con-
cern for appropriate compensation (Noddings, 1984).
Like gift-giving, its ultimate value lies in its ability to
establish and perpetuate an enduring sense of being
extended ‘relations,’ no matter where in the global
village ayni family members may wander.

Ayni means thinking, as many feminist and
Andean economic theorists do, from a philosophy of
abundance rather than scarcity. Vaughan (1997) chal-
lenges us to think of true “value” outside of econom-
ic exchange, to be understood and experienced
through gift-giving. She encourages us to look to rec-
iprocal relationships with lovers, friends, and others
in society as the means for ascribing and achieving a
meaningful life, one which “attributes value by giv-
ing and receiving, and value is, therefore, bestowed
on it, as well” (p. 354).

Conclusions

An integral part of the fabric of traditional Andean
life ways, ayni offers us expanded ways of thinking
about service and social action. It provides the “constant and dynamic weaving that ceremonially threads the relationships between all the living beings” (Apffel-Marglin, 1998, p. 108). It is the response to a request, holding a request for aid in the future. It is both a particular action and a Möbius-strip of actions reflecting back upon themselves with increasing momentum. Like service-learning, engaging in *ayni* claims a place and a stake in a global village. Once you accept the responsibility to respond to a request for *ayni*, it is likely to become a way of life. As Nicole sought an ending for her last paper, she mused, “In conclusion to my essay, there is no conclusion. Acting locally and globally is a life long process for everyone that takes on the task.”

Reciprocity and *ayni* have both relational and action forms. They indicate ways of being in the world as well as the tenuous state of equilibrium that must be mutually tended. In a parallel conclusion, Cox (1986) points out that we must think of “doing peace” rather than thinking of “peace as a kind of condition or state which is achieved or simply occurs. Unlike warring, peace is not thought to be something we can do” (p. 9). We have to take action, and continue to act on the sentiments and understandings that “waging peace” engenders. The ISLE students came to understand more about meaningful engagement in a mutually rewarding service-learning partnership. They began to talk about working for social justice as part of a life-long process. Boulding (1988) underscores the need to reformulate our linguistic approach to ongoing service, and encourages the use of terms such as “peace activator” rather than “peace activist” or even “peace maker,” because these latter terms “carry the connotation that, after the making, there is an achieved state of peace” (p. 141). Peace and reciprocity are passionate searches, not passive states.

Our own search to continually improve all of our domestic and international service-learning programs was benefited by explicit attention to *ayni*. In the course sequence, we now include cultural background about Andean understandings of reciprocity as well as North American academic writing on the subject. We talk about the importance of face-to-face discussions around creating sustainable resources, offering numerous formal and informal opportunities to actually do so in the field and after our return. We expanded our repertoire of debriefing exercises to include reflections on how returnees will keep the cycle going. These include critiquing new meanings of the phrase, “think globally, act locally.” We continue to conduct research and to co-author articles, all of which we exchange for numerous revisions with our partners and colleagues in the Andes. We try to live *ayni* in our interpersonal and professional roles.

Enhancing our philosophical repertoire with a framework of *ayni* offers a patient, multi-faceted approach to engaging others in cycles of exchange that can persevere across both generation and place. *Ayni* starts with the first gesture of trust and continues in increasingly complex cycles of interdependence. Students often wrote and spoke of extending their hands in friendship. We conclude that rather than being a “hand out,” or even a “hand up,” service-learning done in the spirit of *ayni* can be a “hand to.” In Spanish this phrase is *darse la mano*, which appropriately is a reciprocal verb, that is, one that requires mutual giving and taking for the act to be accomplished. With this insight we come full circle, bringing just a little more to the discussion than with what we started. That is, after all, what *ayni* teaches us to do.

**Notes**

The authors would like to gratefully acknowledge many who have provided candid and insightful feedback on earlier drafts of this work. The paper was first presented at an international service-learning conference sponsored by the International Partnership for Service-Learning in Guaquill and Quito, Ecuador. We continued to receive feedback from Diego Quiroga and Dara Larson. Later drafts benefitted from the insights of Michael Sandy of the Global Service Center and Harry Sanabria of the Anthropology Department, both at the University of Pittsburgh. Many thanks also to Aurolyn Lyukx of the Spencer Advanced Studies Institute for her close reading of the test. We also gratefully acknowledge the often lyrical and honest reflection essays contributed by members of the ISLE course.

1 Although *ayni* remains an enduring feature of Andean societies, there are communities where it is largely replaced by commercial relationships or has otherwise largely “disappeared.” However, lack of documentation does not necessarily indicate its disappearance; methodological challenges to ethnographically document *ayni* networks make it difficult to access the true extent of *ayni* in all modern communities.

2 This paper’s co-authorship is an application and extension of the principles of *ayni*. The desire to write about our findings arose from iterative conversations about the significance of what we started in Bolivia and what it might mean for building community at the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. Porter brings to the paper theoretical and professional experience in leading and documenting cross-cultural exchanges. Monard brings professional experience and cultural knowledge of living in an Andean country. Although Monard was compensated through a graduate assistantship, the relationship has always been thought of as more than service rendered under contract. Collaborating on this project is part of what we intend to continue as a life-long, collegial partnership.

3 A half-hour documentary may be ordered from the first author at mporter+r@pitt.edu. It addresses: What does it mean to become a community? How does hands-on education challenge us? What difference does international
service-learning make in the global village? This is a not-for-profit venture.

References


Authors

MAUREEN K. PORTER is an Assistant Professor of educational anthropology at the University of Pittsburgh. Her research, service-learning work, and teaching centers on transformations through situated learning in communities of practice. She continues to lead service-learning courses that connect undergraduates, graduate, staff, and faculty in innovative ways and create meaningful, reciprocal ties with others in the global village.

KATHIA MONARD is a doctoral student in the Social and Comparative Analysis of Education program in the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. She worked in Ecuador as a service-learning program coordinator. Her dissertation focuses on the ways in which international service-learning programs can nurture sensibilities of care, justice, and reciprocity.