



Editorial: Give and Take

K.W. Bridges

Editorial

A hallmark of ethnobiology studies is that researchers try to give something back to the community in exchange for having received information. Books on ethnobiology techniques emphasize the importance of this reciprocal action (Kowal & Padilla 1998, Shanley & Laird 2002). Giving to the community has, for most ethnobiologists, become an ethical obligation (ISE 2004, SEB 2004).

With few exceptions our literature discusses only what we have TAKEN FROM the community. We describe in detail both our methods of obtaining information as well as the resulting data. The reason for this one-sided perspective may only be due to the style in which we write our papers. Where do you fit information about your contribution to the community? Is it part of the "methods" used? Does it fit into "results"?

Consider the implications of adding a few words to every publication that expose how we planned and implemented our community contributions. This addition would, at the least, provide a way for us to share ideas about how we have tried to help. It might even introduce an element of peer review into this aspect of our research. The consequence could be a trend toward better serving the communities that host our research.

As we describe our "give" more explicitly, it is likely that we will be motivated to increase our contributions to host communities. I can envision that this will lead to larger requests for grant support. If a funding agency is reluctant to provide community-support assistance, it should be possible to link proposals so that funding from federal and private sources, for example, can be used to accomplish an overall balanced objective. This may be a good strategy if there is a substantial contribution to the community.

As funding levels for "give" reach parity with "take," separate journal articles will likely be appropriate. For then, we will truly be working WITH our host communities by listening to their needs, evaluating how we can assist, and implementing the best plans in ways that are worthy of our discipline.

It doesn't take much to initiate such a change. As authors, we each need to include at least a small note somewhere in each manuscript that describes our contribution. As reviewers, we need to keep such comments in the manuscript. As editors, we need to promote the recognition of our community contribution so that our literature better matches our activities.

Literature Cited

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