

THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE MISSION OF UNIVERSITIES

Patricia Inman and Hans G. Schuetze (Eds.). National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Leicester, England, 2010, 342 pages.

Given my personal commitments to service, interest in pursuing an academic career, and co-investigative work in a related area, I was excited to read this book. It certainly lived up to my expectations. The text draws on social, cultural, political, historical, economic, and educational perspectives to re-engage readers with long-standing questions and debates about what constitutes community engagement and service and how universities should support their members in doing this work. The authors vehemently advocate for the reprioritization of community engagement and service and the repositioning of this work to the centre (or heart) of universities so that it becomes normative practice embedded within university culture and understood as integrated with research and teaching. I appreciated this argument. To my frustration, while attending a workshop for beginning scholars, service was described to me as “the domestic work of the institution.” I have always struggled with that particular conceptualization of service.

This collection includes contributions by an eclectic group of academics, administrators, researchers, and students from North America, Europe, and Australia. The authors came together through their participation in a community engagement and service conference. It is worth mentioning that some of them have direct ties to at least one of the conference’s two organizing bodies (University of British Columbia’s Centre for Policy Studies in Higher Education and Training, and PASCAL International Observatory).

Each one of the book’s 18 succinctly written chapters could easily stand on its own; yet in its entirety, this complementary and engaging collection effectively illuminates universities’ complex relationships “to and with” their local communities and regions. Informed by the works of recognized scholars in the field (such as Ernest Boyer, Steve Garlick, and Kelly Ward) and seminal texts on engagement (from the Kellogg Commission, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the Carnegie Foundation), the authors call attention to the frequently debated and ever-changing ways in which concepts such as regions, communities, stakeholders, resources, and engagement are defined, understood, and utilized. Admittedly, at times I struggled alongside the writers to make sense of these multi-layered terms. I was intrigued by the repeated use of particular notions such as “synergy,” “universities as brokers,” and “stewardship.” I wished that the authors would have engaged more critically with these concepts.

In general, I appreciated the interspersion of tables, bulleted lists, and figures throughout the text. These devices aid in synthesizing and distilling complex ideas into a comprehensible and reader-friendly form. They also impart some of the book’s most useful content (see, for instance, Charles, Benneworth, Conway, and Humphrey’s discussion of an innovative tool used for benchmarking university-community interactions on pp. 77–82, or Mohrman’s adapted summary of the levels of commitment that universities demonstrate toward community engagement on pp. 150–151).

Four key threads of discussion are interwoven throughout this text:

- The first thread follows a historical and contemporary examination of service and the problematic manner in which it is often forgotten, dismissed, and branded as the “third mission of universities.” Various definitions, constructions, and positionings of community engagement and service work are taken up across the chapters, with reference to a range of institutional documents such as strategic plans, mission statements, and collective agreements.
- The second thread outlines issues that emerge when individuals and institutions attempt to measure, document, and reward engagement activities. As suggested, reconceptualizing individuals’ roles, existing support systems, and requisite tools may cultivate needed clarity, flexibility, and openness within future evaluation processes.
- The third thread documents philosophical and practical matters arising throughout the conduct of university-community engagement activities, and traces the application of diverse knowledges and innovations. Case studies of struggles, successes, and lessons learned provide an expansive look at the intricacies of (a) regional development initiatives, (b) inter-institutional collaborations, (c) action research partnerships, (d) community-based educational programming, and (e) knowledge translation activities. Themes of identity, diversity, otherness, power, politics, and sustainability are also explored.
- The fourth thread attempts to address possible ways in which service and community engagement activities intersect with and inform policy development. Although this thread could have easily become the anchor of this text, policy discussions became peripheral given their lack of development and generic construction across many of the chapters (for a notable exception, see Butterwick and Gurstein’s chapter, pp. 213–230). Identifying and providing a solid contextual grounding of relevant policy matters within one of the introductory chapters of the book would have allowed authors to thoughtfully expand upon the issues raised and draw on specific regional examples to move the discussion forward. Situating relevant policy matters in a more prominent, visible, and concrete manner would have brought greater coherence to this important thread.

In my opinion, the highlight of this book is Inman’s chapter entitled “Institutionalizing University Engagement.” In the chapter, she describes “Fourth Generation Evaluation”—an innovative methodology that advances community-university cooperation via stakeholder education, recognition of multiple perspectives, and collaborative issue identification. It opens the possibility to solve actual problems and improve specific processes and programs that are important to communities (see pp. 105–109). According to the author, “this process can be used for research, evaluation, or policy analyses and allows one to look at the scope of an issue, as well as provide a sophisticated articulation” (p. 108). The potential of the Fourth Generation Evaluation

process becomes evident through a case study involving the successful revitalization of a town farmers' market (pp. 108–115). In this illustrative example, creative local partnerships are established to address practical matters and generate novel solutions that are seen to benefit the diverse stakeholders involved. I longed to read other chapters similarly written in this descriptive and engaging style.

Obviously, the authors do not claim that community engagement work is trouble-free. Their chapters are replete with examples of the extensive obstacles that emerge for members of universities and communities as they attempt to cultivate and sustain meaningful relationships with one another. These challenges include (but are not limited to) time constraints, insufficient funding, increasing governmental controls, exclusionary institutional structures, preoccupations with difference, skeptical attitudes, and narrow measures of success. My own service-related experiences tell me that these matters are often complicated as faculties may be struggling to articulate their own identities, and a sense of unity among the various units of universities (departments, centres, offices, etc.) may not always exist.

This text helps me think carefully about the importance of regional service and community engagement in the 21st century and the ways in which these activities intersect with and extend administrators', professors', and students' roles and responsibilities. As I put down the book, I take note of its fundamental messages, including the importance of valuing local knowledges and the need for respect, humility, and perseverance when building university-community partnerships. Despite some minor copyediting errors, *The Community Engagement and Service Mission of Universities* is a worthwhile and thought-provoking read.

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INNOVATIONS IN LIFELONG LEARNING: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON DIVERSITY, PARTICIPATION, AND VOCATIONAL LEARNING

Sue Jackson (Ed.). Routledge, New York, 2011, 259 pages.

As the title reveals, this collection responds to the question: how do educators engage in critical discussion on lifelong learning and innovation? Fifteen scholars provide detailed theory, historical examples, and compelling stories from their lived experiences. Their authority is evident as they share examples of a lifetime of learning through their contemporary programs and practices. Policy makers, educators, researchers, practitioners, and students will benefit from these perspectives.

This text effectively explores three key elements presented in 12 chapters organized in three sections: Part I, about learning communities, reveals the complexities of social relations and cultural diversity; Part II probes how power relations impact