Review Essay

Shaping the Future of Community Engagement

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Engaging Higher Education Purpose, Platforms, and Programs for Community Engagement

Marshall Welch
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As I opened *Engaging Higher Education: Purpose, Platforms, and Programs for Community Engagement*, I found myself wondering, as I did when I began writing my own *Service-Learning Essentials* (Jacoby, 2015), whether we really need another book on community engagement. It did not take much in the way of reflection to conclude that, yes, we still do need them in general and Marshall Welch's book in particular. We need them in very different ways from the ways we needed them when I started up community service learning at the University of Maryland (UMD) in 1992. What a difference a quarter century makes! Then, at least in my experience, there was not much in the way of intentionality. We were not terribly clear about the real, ultimate purpose of our work, the platforms we needed to put in place so we could go about it, nor what programs we should be implementing.

My story is a case in point. Take yourself back for a moment to the spring of 1992, when the first Clinton -- Bill--was running for president. He was talking about a program that would engage college students and young adults in community service in return for an educational stipend. The program, of course, became AmeriCorps. This prompted the then-President of the University of Maryland, William E. Kirwan, to ask the then-Vice President of Student Affairs (my boss, the venerable William L. "Bud" Thomas, Jr.) whether there was any of this "community service" going on at Maryland. Bud responded that he didn't think there was much, and they both concluded that we should be doing "something." As for me, I was the Director of the Office of Commuter Affairs, running the campus bus system, helping students find off-campus housing, and organizing multiple programs to engage students in campus life. One morning in May, 1992,

I arrived in my office around 8:15 a.m., hadn't unpacked my briefcase, hadn't even gotten my coffee when the phone on my desk rang. It was my boss. He recounted the conversation he had had with Dr. Kirwan and concluded with: "Barbara, I'd like you to take this community service/volunteer thing, whatever you want to call it, into your office and make something of it." Then he hung up the phone.

I proceeded to visit Georgetown and Loyola University Maryland to see what they were up to. It was there that I first heard the term service-learning and how they were assisting faculty members to purposefully integrate community service with academic work. The visits were very helpful, but these institutions are urban, residential, private, and Jesuit. UMD was suburban, public, mostly commuter, and secular. What now? I began to look for a guidebook, a handbook, something that would tell me what I should be doing and how to go about it. But there was precious little. And so I undertook to learn about this exciting new field and to contribute to the literature at the same time. I telephoned the people I thought were (and who truly were) experts in specific areas of the work and asked them if they would be willing to contribute a chapter to what would become *Service-Learning in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices* (Jacoby, 1996). All but one agreed, and numerous colleagues have told me over the years that it provided a roadmap for the beginning of their centers for service-learning.

That was then and this is now. And, yes, we definitely need to continue to nurture and develop the literature of community engagement. Happily, our field continues to grow and evolve, to become more purposeful, to raise new and more complex questions, and to address its difficult dilemmas. And so I am gratified to have this new book and that

Marshall Welch wrote it. Welch's deep and broad experience together with his important research infuse richness, depth, and nuance to the history, present state, and future possibilities of community engagement.

Engaging Higher Education is organized in a thoughtful and useful manner. The three sections are purpose (the why behind what we do), platforms (infrastructure and how we do it), and programs (what we do). The elements of the work Welch describes and the trends and directions he highlights are based on the criteria of the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement and the important research that Welch and John Saltmarsh, formerly of the New England Resource Center for Higher Education, have done.

Part One: Purpose consists of two chapters that address, respectively, the history and definition of community engagement in higher education. Chapter 1, "Pathway of Public Purpose," focuses on the past 30 years and, in Welch's words, "getting to now" (p. 9). As I was actively involved in the work for 25 of those years, I can attest to the accuracy of Welch's account. I found his description of the five phases of higher education's pathway to public service to be particularly sound: (a) public purpose, the founding of the first colonial colleges; (b) pragmatic purpose, the post-World War II explosion of research universities; (c) political purpose, the surge of student volunteerism that emerged from the political malaise of the 1970s and 1980s; (d) pedagogical purpose, the development of service-learning pedagogy and professional associations to support this work; and (e) professional purpose, characterized by the current demand for professionals to run centers, the expansion of professional collectives, and the growth of international associations regarding community engagement.

Reviewing the history of our work is not about nostalgia. I know from my own experience in launching community service learning at UMD that knowing the history of the field and the history of the community engagement of UMD's students, faculty, and administrators was paramount in avoiding potential pitfalls. In starting an office of community service learning, it was important to know that there were community organizations who already felt "partnered to death" (in the words of Judith Ramaley, 2000, p. 241); that a student organization, People Active in Community Effort (PACE), owned a decrepit but beloved blue bus that took student volunteers every week into the community; and that there was a pervasive distrust among faculty of student affairs professionals (which I was) as coeducators. It was also useful to know why several efforts to form a Maryland Cam-

pus Compact had failed and how using that historical perspective finally led to its establishment in 2008.

Chapter 2 focuses on what exactly *is* engagement and why it matters that we have a shared definition and understanding of its complexity. In attempting to proffer a definition of service-learning in *Service-Learning in Higher Education*, I noted that there was a profusion of terms for the work in use and in the growing literature (Jacoby, 1996). With the growth of civic and community engagement in both lexicon and practice, the confusion over what to name our work has only grown. The dilemma I described in 1996 over whether service-learning referred to a program, a pedagogy, or a philosophy applies also to community engagement. Among the highlights of this useful chapter are the distinctions among the many terms that describe our work, including some that were not in common parlance in 20 years ago, such as civic learning and democratic engagement, civic professionalism, engaged pedagogy, and scholarship of engagement. The comprehensive table on Conceptualizing the Evolution of Engaged Pedagogy and Scholarship (p. 49) is a useful update to Furco's well-known Distinctions Among Service Programs, which I still use in all my "Service-Learning 101" workshops. I will now add some of the nuances that Welch provides.

Part Two: Platforms begins with Chapter 3 on institutionalizing community engagement. Welch convincingly analyzes the complexities of this process and the various factors it encompasses, including cultural factors, systemic factors, factors related to institutional leadership, and factors related to other "bottom-up" constituencies, including students, faculty, and community partners (p. 64). I found particularly useful the five key questions that comprise a readiness assessment as the first step in strategic planning for institutionalizing community engagement. As a prerequisite to creating a plan and complementary infrastructure platforms, these questions encourage us to thoughtfully examine institutional mission and history, the skills and values we hope students will gain, campus ethos and partnerships, existing programs that could be enhanced, and how to measure the student and community impacts of engagement. Another highlight of Chapter 3 is the outstanding detailed example of the easy-to-follow, visually formatted strategic plan of Promise South Salt Lake, a comprehensive, data-based partnership of South Salt Lake City, Westminster College, and the local United Way. This partnership is exemplary in multiple ways: "Representatives of community organizations must take on the role of coeducators and partners rather than serve only as a resource to be tapped [and]

community partners must understand that colleges and universities are educational centers and not social service agencies” (p. 82). As obvious as this sounds, implementing such a partnership is quite challenging. The pathways of purpose in community engagement are quite different for community organizations and institutions of higher education. Welch rightfully admonishes both campus and community to carefully and realistically consider where their roles can interact for mutual benefit and where they cannot.

Chapter 4 covers the implementation of community engagement through profiles and models drawn from different types of institutions. The primary profiles are of Wagner College, a private liberal arts college, and the University of Delaware, a large public land-grant, research university. Welch describes how the implementation of community engagement in these and other institutions reflects the factors related to institutionalization enumerated in the previous chapter. Welch reviews three basic organizational models based on the work of Sandmann and Plater (2009). In the centralized model, a single office or center coordinates one or more aspects of engagement, eliminating redundancy of efforts and enabling visibility and accessibility for both campus and community constituencies. The decentralized model comprises programs implemented or coordinated by units throughout the campus. This model allows for specialization related to particular disciplines but also leads to lack of coordination among campus entities and confusion for potential community partners. The third model, the integrated network model, features a central hub that serves as an umbrella that connects and provides resources to curricular and cocurricular units across campus, offering coordination where needed and supporting autonomy as appropriate. The descriptions of these models, together with their advantages and disadvantages, are useful for institutions seeking to assess where they are organizationally in regard to community engagement.

Complementing the first two chapters in Part Two, Chapter 5 is about infrastructure and operations of campus centers of engagement. The first section on guiding principles and practices for campus centers was a trip down memory lane. I well remember how challenging it was in 1994 to find authors for the chapter on starting a service-learning center that I felt was so essential to include in *Service-Learning in Higher Education* (Bucco & Busch, 1996). There were so few well-established centers at that time! I was heartened to see the mention of the CAS standards for service-learning programs and clearly remember serving on the committee of the Council for the Advancement of

Standards in Higher Education that encountered many challenges in drafting the first set of standards for service-learning programs, which were published by the Council in 2009. Welch’s very useful table of practices and structural elements of campus centers for community engagement is a clear indicator of how far we have come from those early days to the systems perspective that Welch and Saltmarsh used in their survey of the operational infrastructure of campus centers that yielded the data for the table. We all should be grateful that the complete version of this inventory appears in the appendices to this book and also online in a growing national database. The online database enables individual institutions to compare their results with aggregate results of other types of institutions with and without the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement.

I also found the sections on human resources and center location in Chapter 5 to be helpful in understanding the sometimes confusing hybrid role in which I and many other community engagement professionals, particularly center directors, have found ourselves. Welch recognizes how center directors with backgrounds in student affairs and academic affairs, respectively, bring both advantages and challenges to the role. For me, as an experienced student affairs professional, I came into the role with broad and deep relationships across campus as well as skills in networking, supervision, working with student leaders, handling logistics, and developing programs. I quickly came to realize, however, that I lacked apparent credibility with some academic leaders until they recognized my doctorate and teaching experience in a traditional academic discipline, French literature. Aptly subtitled “Location, Location, Location” (p. 129), this short but critical section on the campus physical location of centers for engagement highlights two often conflicting considerations: visibility and easy access in a central campus location and placement on the boundary of the campus with convenient access for community partners.

The third part of the book focuses on the wide variety of programs that engage students, faculty, and community partners in mutually beneficial community-based experiences. I was immediately gratified to see that Chapter 6 on Engaging Students includes programs in three categories: cocurricular, curricular, and degrees or certificates. Throughout its history, some of our well-respected colleagues have viewed service-learning as exclusively course-based. On the other hand, I have always believed that high-quality cocurricular service-learning experiences in particular and community engagement experiences in general

can be and are facilitated by student affairs professionals, campus ministers, community partners, and student leaders. I am also pleased that Welch highlights the Carnegie Classification's requirement regarding student leadership that "nudges administrators, and staff to reimagine the students' role" in community engagement (p. 138). The table of student leadership roles indicates many ways in which students serve as partners in all phases of community engagement (p. 139). To these I would add a few other roles that students play, such as alternative break leaders, engaged scholars, community organization board members, and philanthropists. I welcome Welch's admonition that we must do our best to ensure that both student participants and student leaders of community engagement understand the purpose and principles of community engagement in order to avoid falling into the complaisance of just putting in the hours and completing a task. In every faculty workshop and consultation I do, I pointedly recommend that faculty members include in their syllabi a definition of community engagement, a clear rationale of why it is an integral part of the course, and the desired outcomes for both students and community. The overview of the current forms and examples of student engagement is well organized and helpful to both those experienced and those new to the field.

Chapter 7 on Engaging Faculty begins with two premises that are indeed true based on my years of experience in faculty development for community engagement. First, community-engaged teaching is hard work. I have never forgotten the faculty member with much experience with service-learning who once told me that teaching his courses without service-learning is like cruising down an empty highway while teaching a service-learning course is like driving a tractor. And, yes, few of us had any training in how to teach, although our Ph.D.s were designed to prepare us for college-level teaching. I found the five developmental components Welch cites a useful theoretical foundation for faculty development reflective of my own practice: (a) entry point based on internal or external need or trigger, (b) plan to change practice, (c) active experimentation with course design and delivery, (d) observation of impact, and (e) reflection on the impact of the trial application and determination whether (and how) to refine and proceed (Van Note Chism, Palmer, & Price 2013). I found the lengthy table entitled Faculty Development Skill Set for Community Engaged Teaching and Scholarship to be comprehensive and practical for those of us who engage in faculty development (pp. 167-170). I was particularly happy to see the section on critical reflection that addresses important distinctions between

teaching with and without community engagement, including living with ambiguity, dealing with unanswerable questions or ones with messy answers, acknowledging and recovering from mistakes, and comfortably embracing conflict as it arises. In addition, the list and description of the multiple forms of faculty development for engagement is reflective of my own experiences and useful for staff of teaching and learning centers as well as centers for community engagement.

Engaging Community Partners is the subject of Chapter 8, which appropriately begins with the recognition that in the early days of service-learning, and still to some extent today, students were often assigned to find their own community service sites and to log a requisite number of hours. This awareness encourages us to try to avoid this questionable practice and to instead seek mutually beneficial, even if transactional, partnerships. As with the list of faculty development practices in the previous chapter, I found the comprehensive list of elements of community partnerships to be especially helpful in benchmarking our own institutions, particularly because the list compares the offerings of institutions that have received the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement versus those that have not (pp.194-195). The descriptions of place-based and anchor programs, including those of the Netter Center at the University of Pennsylvania, the University Neighborhood Partners program at the University of Utah, and the Seattle University Youth Initiative provide outstanding and inspirational examples for the future development of our institutions' partnerships. Many of us think and work in terms of course-based partnerships, which are hopefully beneficial in and of themselves. The examples of the comprehensive programs Welch provides encourage us to think in terms of possibilities that include broader and deeper place-based as well as issue-based partnerships. I have seen this happen. In the earliest days of service-learning at UMD, I was pleased to provide support to a health-education course at the University of Maryland that eventually grew into a county-wide health partnership involving UMD, the county government, the health professions schools of the University of Maryland Baltimore, and the state.

In the culminating chapter, Welch offers his thoughts about the promise, perils, and projections for community engagement. Among the promises of our work are the proliferation of centers for community engagement and the catalyzing effect of the Carnegie Classification on the growth and enhancement of centers and on community engagement writ large. The dramatic increase in research about our work and what makes it effective goes hand in

hand with the promise of the professionalization of our field. I and many others of us await with anxious anticipation the set of professional competencies that Campus Compact is working on as this review essay goes to press. Also promising are the democratization of education, as Welch names it, in which students are viewed as cocreators of knowledge and community-based work, and the rise of new and innovative models of collaboration between universities and communities that create a shared, co-owned “third space” (p. 214).

By describing the perils of our work, Welch encourages us to be critically reflective professionals and scholars in regard to the difficulties of changing the systems and cultures of our institutions to embrace community engagement, the organizational silos and limits caused by disciplinary guildism, the oft-cited critiques of higher education as commodified and decentralized, the challenges of reforming tenure and promotion to recognize engaged scholarship and teaching, and, finally, the cumbersome logistics and risk management procedures that are becoming ever more burdensome. The final section on projections summarizes and highlights the trends and issues raised throughout the book, including the potential of engaged scholarship to “double dip” to address diversity and inclusion and to expand to fully engage STEM programs of research and study (p. 223). Welch projects that centers for community engagement will continue to evolve and will look different in the future; new hybrid forms of engagement will emerge as institutions and communities continue to explore what it means to develop a fuller, deeper sense of place; and that professionalism and research will continue to enrich and enhance our work and its benefits to all its constituencies.

In conclusion, I am grateful to Welch for this book that will be helpful to me in my work across the globe with many stakeholders in the field, including student leaders, faculty members, community partners, center directors and staff, other academic and student affairs administrators, presidents, and governing board members. All these stakeholders are interested in what community engagement is really about, what are its potentials and pitfalls, what it takes to do it well, and what are the anticipated costs and results. I think back on how valuable *Engaging Higher Education* would have been to me as a new center director based in student affairs when my boss told me, literally, “Barbara, don’t start out by trying to work with faculty because they’ll sink your ship before you get it out of the harbor.” Or, how much I could have used it back then to prepare the presentation of my hopes (and budget requirements) for our new center to the president and cab-

inet. The chief financial officer listened to my presentation and then retorted, “Well, my church has a reading program for underprivileged kids and it doesn’t have any budget.” The book’s generous appendices would have been worth the purchase price alone to me then as well as now. We always seem to need to provide justification and rationale to sustain and grow our work.

What would I have liked to hear about from Welch in this book? I would have appreciated more nuanced profiles of some of the centers, including mistakes they made and lessons they learned. I want to know what Welch would add to the research agenda for the scholarship *on* engagement. Welch covers assessment in this book but, as he well knows, assessment is necessary but not sufficient. According to Bringle, Clayton, and Hatcher (2013), assessment “asks questions about *what* is happening in a particular context; research on the other hand, inquires into *why* it is happening” (p. 10). I am curious to know more about what Welch sees as the potential of collective impact, where multiple campus and community entities focus in on a particular issue or neighborhood. We are hearing more about anchor institutions, place-based, and issue-based engagement. How do we know whether we really make a difference in the long run? I would like to know Welch’s thoughts on questions like these: Are institutionalization and professionalization infinite goods for our work or are there possible downsides? I and most other advocates of community engagement believe that it must be institutionalized if it is to survive and thrive into the future. However, institutionalization and professionalization of our work give rise to critical issues that must be balanced along with the many benefits we believe it affords. For example, does institutionalization support the goals of the current educational system which many of us would agree needs serious repair? What is the relationship of community engagement to social innovation and entrepreneurship? What are some of the undersides and unintended consequences of our work and how do we avoid them? Should our primary focus be on local or global engagement? So, my final question is to my colleague and friend Marshall Welch: How about another book to complement this one and to continue to enrich the professional literature of our field that you have so enriched and that you so value?

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