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# Overcoming Marginalization and Disengagement in Adult Education: Adult Educators' Contributions to the Scholarship of Engagement

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Keywords: Scholarship of engagement, service learning, community-based research

**Abstract:** As adult educators whose work has had an impact on shaping the discourse on scholarly engagement, service-learning and community-based education, we will describe our different approaches to this movement and share our diverse practical experiences fostering greater community engagement in the areas of teaching, research and service.

There is a social movement afoot in higher education that is calling for scholars to reframe their conventional understanding of teaching, research and service in the academy (Ramaley, 2004). For reformist and revolutionary-minded educators alike, this social movement calls for a profound shift in educators' taken-for-granted habits and philosophical assumptions around the role of higher education in improving society (Lisman, 1998). The "scholarship of engagement," as the movement is commonly referred to, builds on ideas formulated by Ernest Boyer (1990, 1996). Boyer (1996) stated that "the scholarship of engagement means connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems, to our children, to our schools, and to our cities" (p. 19-20).

Educators who define their work within the scholarship of engagement movement tend to draw from service-learning pedagogy, community-based participatory research and public scholarship as a set of powerful strategies for generating knowledge and practices that are more useful to alleviating social problems affecting communities outside the walls of the academy (Bringle, Games & Malloy, 1999). Although the philosophical, theoretical and practical dimensions of this movement seem to be consistent with adult educators who place their work within the social justice mission of the field, it is unfortunate that adult educators have largely remained absent from the current discourse on the theory and practice of scholarly engagement. Does this lack of involvement in shaping the engagement movement in higher education reflect adult educators' willful disengagement, limited knowledge of the engagement discourse, and/or the increasing (whether perceived or real) marginalization of the field of adult education within the institutions where we work?

This symposium represents an effort to engage in dialogue on how adult educators might further the scholarship of engagement movement in higher education. Along with discussing our own experiences and ideas, the symposium is intended to stimulate greater dialogue with participants on three important questions: What are the definitional, conceptual and practical dimensions of scholarship of engagement movement in higher education? Why has the field of

adult education remained relatively silent in the engagement discourse and what role does/should adult education have in shaping it? What specific theoretical and practical contributions can and should adult educators make to help inform and improve upon how higher education leaders understand and practice the scholarship of engagement?

### **Service-learning as Scholarly Engagement**

Richard Kiely

An ongoing philosophical debate central to the work of adult educators has to do with addressing the relationship between individual learning and social change (Merriam & Brockett, 1997). Similarly, Weigert (1998) contends that the service learning movement in higher education emerged as a “cultural critique” of the university’s role (or lack thereof) in generating knowledge useful to society. Service-learning has to do with higher education’s role in defining the public good, preparing students to be socially responsible citizens as essential for the maintenance of a democratic society, and in generating research directly applicable to the welfare of society (Weigart, 1998).

There are a number of different conceptual models underpinning service-learning practice each of which highlight tensions and possibilities in linking individual learning and social change (Leeds, 1997; Morton, 1995). While some service-learning educators are critical of social change advocates for having what they believe is a naïve view of service-learning’s transformative potential (Langseth and Troppe, 1997, Leeds, 1999), this presentation will focus on how adult education has contributed to my understanding of service-learning: as a transformative pedagogy, a mechanism for institutional change, an approach to community-based participatory research, and as a strategy for fostering community development.

While the service-learning movement has had very little effect on the field of adult education, increasing numbers of faculty in a variety of academic disciplines have begun to incorporate service-learning into their work (Jacoby & Associates, 2003). Based on a review of the scholarly literature, service-learning educators and researchers tend to view the scholarship of engagement through a narrow pedagogical lens (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kiely, 2005a). As a result, much of the research in service-learning focuses on proving academic rigor through the assessment of individual learning outcomes related to disciplinary knowledge, while largely neglecting the transformative potential of service-learning on students, faculty, institutions and communities (2005a).

As a pedagogy, service-learning goes beyond the classroom into the community and provides adult learners with an innovative experiential approach to teaching and learning. Community problems, rather than pre-determined textbooks and syllabi, emerge as a living text driving theory and practice in service-learning courses. Underpinning this experiential learning process is the need for critical reflection and dialogue among multiple stakeholders, and it is here where adult educators make an important contribution to the pedagogy of service-learning (Kiely, 2004).

Because service-learning programs place participants directly in potentially unfamiliar local and global community contexts, adult educators’ extensive work in program planning (Cervero & Wilson, 2006), community development (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993), and participatory forms of research (Kiely, 2005b) could also have a substantial impact on service-learning educators understanding of how to plan and implement community-based programs. As an adult educator working for a large university that is situated in a county that has one of the highest poverty rates in the U.S., I have spent four years developing a transformative service-

learning model to promote scholarly engagement. The service-learning model, which draws from adult education theories in program planning, organizational change, community development and participatory action research, has generated useful knowledge that has had a surprising transformative impact on individuals, institutions and communities. Greater involvement of adult educators in the service-learning movement will only enhance its transformative potential.

### **Faculty Scholarly Engagement**

Lorilee Sandmann

“Scholarship is a choice of how to live as well as a choice of a career...”

Mills, C. W. (1959, p. 198)

Because the work and identity of faculty is as scholars, at the center of the engagement movement is a discussion about the “scholarship” of engagement. Boyer (1996, 1990) defined “scholarship” to indicate practices that cut across the categories of academic scholarship that he had previously identified (discovery, teaching, application and integration) and “engagement” to suggest a reciprocal, collaborative relationship with partners external to the university. That is, “the scholarship of engagement consists of (a) research, teaching, integration and application scholarship that (b) incorporates reciprocal practices of civic engagement into the production of knowledge” (Barker, 2004, p. 124).

Since Boyer’s naming of the scholarship of engagement there has been lively discussions in many sectors to advance our understanding about it. Major discussions have occurred in forums such as the former American Association of Higher Education’s Conference on Faculty Roles and Rewards. There have been discussions within the disciplines, most notably exemplified by Burawoy, who as president of the American Sociological Association (ASA) made public sociology the theme of the ASA 2004 annual conference and wrote lead articles on the topic in sociological journals (2004, 2005). Through other academic publications such as the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* or through volumes such as *Scholarship in the Postmodern Era: New Venues, New Values, New Visions* (Zahorski, 2002), the conversation continues. Special reports have been issued on the topic including one by the Commission on Community-Engaged Scholarship in the Health Professions (2005). To clarify standards of scholarly excellence a National Review Board for the Scholarship of Engagement was established (Sandmann, 2002). Dimensions of scholarly engagement are appearing in institutional accountability and accreditation systems as well as the newly revised Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching’s higher education classification system (2005).

Through these efforts as well as through the documentation and review of faculty actual practice, it is clear that the scholarship of engagement is not a renaming of the service category of the traditional tripartite mission of the academy. Holland (as cited in Brukardt, Holland, Percy, & Zimpher, 2004) summed this perspective by noting that “the scholarship of engagement and the idea of community partnerships are not about service. They are about extraordinary forms of teaching and research and what happens when they come together” (p. 2).

The scholarship of engagement does not supplant the triad of teaching, research and service, but broadens it. By adhering to the standards of quality scholarship as well as the tenets and values of engagement, the scholarship of engagement is scholarship that is cutting across or integrated within teaching, research and outreach, and cutting across disciplinary boundaries. It is characterized as scholars working with communities, not merely in or for communities. This type of scholarship engages faculty in academically relevant work that simultaneously

fulfills the campus mission and goals as well as community needs (Driscoll & Sandmann, 2001; Sandmann, 2002). Many faculties, seeing the impact of their scholarship in social good, are embracing and evolving the understanding and practice of engaged scholarship.

This conceptualization of the scholarship of engagement continues to emerge and to expand as campuses manifest context-driven characteristics reflecting the correspondence between their notions of scholarship and individual histories, priorities, circumstances, and locations. It is also informed by the international dialogue that is questioning traditional research—its sources of expertise, its ends, and its audience (Brukardt, Holland, Percy, & Zimpher, 2004). In the *New Production of Knowledge*, Great Britain's Gibbons and other academics place science policy and scientific knowledge in the context of contemporary society. They call for “multi-sided conversation” between the scholarly community and the practitioner community to widen horizons and improve lives that would make for engaged scholarship that is heterogeneous, multi-directional, collaborative, highly participatory, and serving multiple audiences (Gibbons, et al. 1994; Gibbons, 2001).

Where is the field of adult education, with roots in community practice and social activism, in the conversations redefining and re-conceptualizing scholarship, particularly the scholarship of engagement? Where is this field's voice within the global or national context as part of the engagement movement; within our discipline to define how engagement is or can be integrated into our disciplinary traditions; and on campuses, within schools, colleges, and departments as reflection of our unique culture and communities of learning? Where is the field's leadership in regards to faculty recruitment, recognition and reward structures for scholarly engagement? And, fundamentally, is the scholarship of our field “disengaged”?

### **Participating in Communities**

Susan Bracken

Within the range of academic adult education interest areas, we dedicate a great deal of scholarship to increasing our critical understanding of community-based development, social action or justice and education. Enmeshed in our criticality is the concept that we are participants in shaping and influencing our own environments – this occurs with or without our tacit acknowledgement. Our critical pedagogies and power analyses claim that it is simply not enough, or even possible, to situate the shaping of norms, culture and community outside of ourselves. This view of positionality operates as an explicit and implicit politics of responsibility. As members of communities, we are responsible for learning about, critically reflecting, participating, and shaping our surroundings.

Perhaps a good starting point is to ask, how do we define community? Many of us traditionally define communities by virtue of geography, or a space shared among groups. Lave and Wenger (1991) define communities of practice as ongoing social relations among people with shared activities, allowing for sense of structure and shared knowledge that define a shared enterprise as ‘a community of practice’. A classic definition (Tonnies, 1963) of *gemeinschaft-gesellschaft* stipulates a sense of collective identity, including features of social control and other culturally mediated processes that maintain uniform structures and behaviors, creating a classic interplay/tension between community and society. For this paper, I suggest the definition used by Blanco (1995), a scholar who specializes in community planning. Blanco (1995) applies Royce's classic 1913 definition of community:

a group of individuals that shares a common past, that is, a memory; a group that shares a common practice through communication, decision making, and action

and thus shares a common present; and a group that shares hopes and plans for a common future infused with values and ideals. To form a community is to develop a public, collective entity—a public mind. This public mind is that part of individual consciousness that is shared, that bridges individual experience, that establishes solidarity among individuals (p.69).

As academic scholars, we are members of a university community, from individual, program, or department levels to international levels within our disciplinary and specialty areas. We are of a public mind, so to speak, in sharing and participating in past, present and future rituals, traditions, work processes, ways of approaching activity, and of communicating and establishing shared values with one another. We sustain a sense of solidarity, complete with squabbles and celebrations. Yet in my observation when we casually remark about something we do not like in how the university system operates, we often engage in a process of ‘othering’ and position ourselves outside of the system, absolving ourselves from the unpleasant or frustrating challenge of actively participating within one of our own communities. Choices of language like “those administrators” or “that tenure process” reflect our positionalities. When engaged in teaching or research fieldwork, there is a temptation to identify or align with the practitioner or grassroots community lens, thus implicitly positioning ourselves outside of our academic identities yet again. It is an interesting irony when juxtaposed against core principles of agency and participation that we value in our field.

We sometimes engage in debates about how to best navigate the overlapping tensions between our academic communities with our grassroots or ‘real’ communities. Adult education scholars or academics with specialty areas in social justice, critical theory, or community-based education are, therefore, members of sometimes overtly disparate communities: university environments and “real” or community environments. Cunningham (2000) and Welton (1987) are scholars who raise this issue, including the risks members of the academic community run of co-optation. In other words, their concern is that allegiance to the academy will inappropriately override more important focal points of identity in adult education such as communities ‘out there’ where real people live and work. This tension permeates our scholarship and reflective practice.

For me, this raises an important aspect of reflective practice (Schon, 1983). There is a certain sigh of relief in my ‘real’ community practice because it aesthetically feels more free, less constraining, and adds a sense of value or meaningfulness to my work. Our field debates about how to sustain and develop optimal criticality in our immediate, internal academic community. By and large, adult education scholarship is shared in classrooms, conferences and journals developed and shared within a relatively closed system. With the same audiences, we also have ongoing examinations of what it means to be a critical practitioner in adult education. We do not appear to direct our reflective or participatory energy into discussing ways in which we, as university community members, can make contributions or engage in sustained collaboration with other disciplines or our larger academic environments. We appear to defer or accept our larger university environments as a given, and work with what we like and around what we don’t like. When adult education faculty members are involved in these processes, it is on an ad hoc level based upon individual interest or administrative posts, and not something which permeates the discourse more broadly.

The scholarship of engagement promotes university policies and practices that overtly value and encourage faculty work that places community-based groups and organizations side-by-side with university researchers, learning from each other while jointly addressing

community-based problems. On the surface, this appears to be a natural match with our field, even with the concerns that Cunningham (2000) raises about the chasm between theorizing and the real world that can occur in university projects. Without a doubt, there are adult education faculty members and graduate students actively integrating their research and practice. However, their scholarship activities are generally not a part of the broader engagement discourse – in terms of shaping university practice, policies, and rewards for engagement or in making theoretical and practical contributions to the knowledge base in other fields that are involved in the scholarship of engagement.

However, what stays with me is my own sense of congruence in what I teach and value in adult education practice: the choice to participate in shaping the environment of my communities. If we, as adult educators, are willing to sidestep this issue, then what field more appropriately should be conducting integrated and community-based research and practice, particularly from a critical lens? I also would like to suggest that another potential barrier to adult education involvement with the scholarship of engagement may be that we have our own disciplinary norms and interpretations of what real social change looks like. Perhaps it isn't counter-culture or grassroots enough to include the broader university as an important community within which we work and participate. I'm not sure if this is a reflection of my (our?) superficiality or of deeply held convictions tied to experience and practice. My answer seems to depend on when, how and by whom the question is asked.

We are approaching a crossroads in the field of adult education as the academy and higher education continues to go through increased public scrutiny accompanied by demands for more accountability. We are asked to find ways to do more with less. Perhaps a beginning point for dealing with these larger issues is to redefine ourselves as participatory members of the university community. As a part of that view, we could ask what our field has to contribute, to whom, and in what ways? What are our patterns of participation and what would we like them to be? How can we avoid co-optation? Does our experience and knowledge base of adult learning, social change, and community-based education and organizing have a place in the scholarship of engagement? Elsewhere?

Involvement in the scholarship of engagement offers an opportunity for adult education scholars to further think through and investigate the concept of praxis, of our theories within the field as brought to bear in context. It offers an opportunity to actively shape how scholars in other fields work within communities and develop their sense of criticality. It offers an opportunity for us to attempt to increase the value the larger university community places on an activity that we already value and experience – critical community engagement.

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