HIGHER EDUCATION EXCHANGE
The Higher Education Exchange is founded on a thought articulated by Thomas Jefferson in 1820:

I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education.

In the tradition of Jefferson, the Higher Education Exchange agrees that a central goal of higher education is to help make democracy possible by preparing citizens for public life. The Higher Education Exchange is part of a movement to strengthen higher education’s democratic mission and foster a more democratic culture throughout American society. Working in this tradition, the Higher Education Exchange publishes case studies, analyses, news, and ideas about efforts within higher education to develop more democratic societies.
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It is becoming increasingly apparent that higher education is struggling to reinvent itself in the face of new challenges—from shrinking public expenditures and unsustainable tuition prices to economic uncertainties and loss of democratic commitment. Yet these challenges also present remarkable opportunities for innovation, experimentation, and civic purpose—and a broader look at where these new ideas and practices are likely to emerge. Questions about the future of higher education have been taken up in multiple settings over the past few years, culminating most recently in a report issued by the American Association of Colleges and Universities, *A Crucible Moment*. The report boldly calls for institutions of higher education to act as “sites for learning and practicing democratic and civic responsibilities” (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement 2012).

While large-scale change in higher education has historically been slow to develop, new practices for publicly engaged pedagogies that value different ways of knowing are emerging. A diverse array of public deliberation programs and courses has been initiated at colleges and universities, and as a result, a growing network of centers for public life is leading conversations on public issues—including the role of higher education in society—through National Issues Forums and other types of deliberations. The efficacy of public deliberation at resolving complex issues has led to its elements being incorporated into domains beyond the public policy or political sphere. One of the most prominent of these areas is education; specifically, deliberation as an integral part of pedagogy. David Mathews defines *deliberative politics* as the integration of deliberative decision making with public action (Mathews 2012). *Deliberative pedagogy* integrates deliberative decision making with teaching and learning.

Public deliberation is joined by more widespread publicly engaged practices—such as service learning and community
engagement—that help to educate for civic responsibility through reciprocal partnerships that take place outside the walls of campus. According to the Higher Education Research Institute, 65% of college freshmen reported that their campuses offered opportunities for community service or community service learning (Butin and Seider 2012). This is not all that surprising given the growing infrastructure on campuses to support community-based learning. There are centers of service learning and civic engagement on up to 94 percent of colleges and universities that belong to Campus Compact, a national coalition that helps to support the integration of civic and community-based learning (Campus Compact 2008), along with college majors, minors, and a new career track for directors of community education.

But these publicly engaged practices—democratic deliberation and service learning/community engagement—too often take place in isolation. New ways of knowing through publicly engaged pedagogies often simply mirror the silo mentality that permeates more traditional models of teaching and learning. And yet there are civic engagement programs and practices that attempt to bridge these pedagogical divides: namely, deliberative dialogue that connects with education in the community.

Connecting deliberative pedagogy and the community is not entirely new. It draws upon historical efforts—such as those developed by the Highlander Folk School during the civil rights movement—led by educators such as Myles Horton, Septima Clark, and Bernice Robinson. Among the significant contributions of Highlander are processes that were used in the “learning circle” method, which empowered people by democratizing the decision-making process. This, for Horton, was integrally tied to education. He argued that learning and decision making are inseparable. “People learn from making decisions,” Horton explains, “and making decisions helps them learn” (Horton 1973, 245). Thus, Highlander involved students in naming, framing, and ultimately acting on the issues that mattered most to them.

This insight can be seen in practice in higher education today. Deliberative pedagogy in the community is more than a unique type of deliberative practice. It also illustrates the emergence of a new approach to teaching and learning. This more collaborative
approach to teaching and learning—in part the result of increased diversity, new technologies that promote transparency and collaboration, and the civic experiences of the millennial generation—offers a new educational paradigm. It moves us beyond a shift from “teaching-to-learning” toward a model of “collaborative engagement” where knowledge is more genuinely co-created through reflective public action. The shift toward collaboration also helps us to see the potential for deliberative pedagogy to illuminate the civic dimensions of teaching and learning in a time of rapid transformation in higher education.

Talking Outside the Classroom

Throughout our nation’s history, education has been linked to the promise of democracy. Deliberative pedagogy is often used as a vehicle to make this connection in higher education, as it spans many domains—connecting communication studies with civic learning and combining new approaches for teaching and learning with productive possibilities for multicultural education.

Deliberative pedagogy most often occurs inside the boundaries of the classroom. For instance, a faculty member might use public deliberation to help students understand the nature of public policy choices, to develop skills in group communication, or to understand a specific public issue such as immigration, the federal debt, or education reform. These approaches to public deliberation tend to be not only important examples of civic learning, but also engaged teaching and learning. Yet confining education to the classroom can be constricting, as it overlooks the many assets of community and community institutions for learning. “The American tendency to equate education and schooling and make schools the instrument for satisfying our wants and alleviating our malaise takes attention from our circumstances,” writes John Goodlad. “We bet on schools, leaving the contextual circumstances unaddressed” (Goodlad 1997, 41). This applies not only to K-12
schooling, but also higher education. Schooling and communities are inextricably linked; solutions to the problems in each must be addressed by harnessing the many talents in the entire “ecology of education” (Cremin 1976).

A growing number of educators are recognizing the power of the community for civic learning, drawing upon the educational philosophies of such pioneers as Jane Addams, John Dewey, Elsie Clapp, Myles Horton, and Lawrence Cremin. These educators have found that thinking more broadly about where learning takes place unleashes a vast set of resources for learning; it also allows education to be more connected to democratic revitalization.

Education in the community is active learning that takes place outside of, but often connected with, the classroom. It involves more than a short-term community service project; it means intentionally putting education in the context of long-term community building efforts. It is most often place-based, using a collaborative, integrated, problem-solving approach. The role of community more often gets recognized as part of student internships, practicums, international immersion, and especially service learning courses in higher education; yet there is also a strand of education in the community that includes public deliberation (which, it is important to note, is where deliberative politics is most likely to take place). In a growing number of courses and programs, for instance, students are involved in public deliberation in community-based settings that go well beyond any introduction to deliberation. Today, students are involved in a variety of deliberative projects that ask them to take leadership in their local communities. And these practices of deliberative pedagogy, which involve reciprocal community partnerships, are also powerful models that begin to challenge traditional notions of politics, engagement, and education. Deliberative pedagogy in the community connects—and transforms—deliberative dialogue and community engagement by attempting to create space for reciprocal conversations, grounded in real-world experiences, which lead to public judgment and collective action.

A Promising Practice in Higher Education

Providence College’s Feinstein Institute for Public Service is experimenting with deliberative pedagogy in the community with the development of the PC/Smith Hill Annex, which draws explicitly
on the examples set by Myles Horton and other historical models such as Jane Addams at Hull House and the social settlement house movement. The Annex is a 1,000 square-foot storefront leased by Providence College from the Smith Hill Community Development Corporation, a long-time partner of the college’s Feinstein Institute.

Keith Morton of Providence College, who spearheads the project, describes it as “a space for community and campus to come together.” The Annex hosts courses open to students and community members; potluck dinners and book clubs; breakdance, exercise and street art programs; strategic planning meetings of partner organizations; education and support groups for people contending with a variety of challenges—any configuration that will bring campus and community into dialogue. The expectation is that over time the co-creation of this shared space will facilitate campus and community “getting to know one another as neighbors.” Morton concludes: “Our deep hope is that these conversations will help the people and institutions articulate and realize what it is that they find most meaningful” (Battistoni, Longo, and Morton, forthcoming).

As part of the PC/Smith Hill Annex, the Feinstein Institute is partnering with College Unbound, an experimental college for nontraditional college students, and several high schools and community-based organizations to offer courses around the theme “The City and . . .” The annual course, which is offered each fall semester, provides space for intergenerational conversations and reflective practice around the city of Providence. The first course in the fall of 2011, The City and Its Youth, examined the theme of youth and youthwork. The subsequent course, The City and Its Storytellers, focused on capturing neighborhood-based storytelling in Providence. Future themes being considered include The City and Its Arts, The City and the World, and The City and Its Future.

**Overcoming Challenges**

While this initiative offers a compelling example of the potential link between deliberation and community engagement, there are also challenges when asking college students to take real responsibility in the community. Unlike Highlander, for instance, the above example is located within the confines of university education, which is built upon numerous artificial constructions
of time. Students take classes measured in credit hours, courses are offered in terms, schedules change each semester until students amass enough hours at the university to graduate. These ways of thinking about time grow out of a scientific conception of learning. John Tagg (2003) suggests that common conceptions of time in higher education result in a limited “time horizon.” That is, students and teachers think they will have to live with the consequences of their actions at school for only a brief time.

In one example of this limited time horizon, J. Herman Blake tells a story of trying to see if some of his college students could intern at Highlander. Blake had been at Highlander, knew Myles Horton, and was aware of Highlander’s work with communities. Thinking this would be an ideal learning experience for his students, he asked Horton, then still director of Highlander, if his students from Santa Cruz could come and do internships at Highlander. “Yes,” Horton replied, “we will be glad to have them, provided that they stay with us for two years” (quoted in Wallace 2000, 133). This was not a commitment many students in higher education could make.

Others have raised related challenges about the role of student leadership in the community. For instance, an early pioneer in the service-learning movement, Richard Cone offers a challenge that empowering students in campus-community partnerships means giving ownership of civic engagement efforts to the most transient and least experienced of those involved in the partnerships. The ethical dilemma that Cone shares is the uncertainty as to “how to engage students in a way that they acquired a sense of humility and a respect for those they serve.” Cone questions the privilege associated with many students in institutions of higher learning, who he fears “would use their service experiences to acquire skills and knowledge they could use to further disenfranchise those already disenfranchised” (Cone 1996, 21). In giving students more responsibility for leading deliberation in the community, do we run the risk of increasing their sense of privilege and shifting control of the learning even further away from the community? These challenges can be overcome, however, by applying the heightened expectations that come from what Richard Battistoni has termed a “sustained, development, cohort” approach that prepares and supports students
to be engaged democratic citizens in community settings (Mitchell et al. 2011). Battistoni and his colleagues describe the impact of multi-year programs such as the Public and Community Service Studies major at Providence College, the Citizen Scholar Program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and the Public Service Scholars Program at Stanford University—all of which have existed since the mid-1990s—on the formation of civic identities and effective campus-community partnerships. These programs each contain four fundamental principles that help produce students with an enhanced civic identity and the skills necessary for relational, action-oriented leadership, which include student voice, community collaboration, engaged scholarship, and a commitment to reflective practice. Furthermore, when community partnerships are thought of as long-term, reciprocal relationships, space is opened for experimentation, mistakes, and flexibility as both sides of the partnership see themselves as dedicated to the long haul.

Deliberative pedagogy in the community also seems to offer an opportunity to address criticisms leveled against deliberative dialogue and community engagement, respectively. For instance, one criticism of deliberative dialogue is a version of the old adage “all talk, no action”—or as Myles Horton explained, “All you do is sit there and tell stories” (Horton & Freire 1990, 99). In advocating for the importance of including public work in deliberative civic engagement, Harry Boyte explains:

Deliberative democracy, welcome as it is, is not enough. Alone, it all too easily takes on a hortatory, idealized quality that separates out an abstract “public sphere” of communicative consensus from real world politics built upon negotiation, bargaining, messy compromise and also creative work to what was once termed, in American history, the commonwealth. (Boyte 1995)

Similarly, critics point to the seemingly apolitical nature of community engagement. This can be seen in the language and framework of service learning, the most common form of community engagement, with its emphasis on “serving needs” and addressing community “deficiencies” (McKnight 1995). Many forms of community engagement also fail to recognize the nature of politics and power. Boyte contends that service routinely “neglects to teach about root causes and power relationships, fails to stress productive impact,
ignores politics, and downplays the strengths and talents of those being served” (Boyte 2004, 12).

Deliberative pedagogy in the community opens opportunities for deliberation to incorporate political themes into community engagement projects as students become involved in reflective conversations with a diverse set of stakeholders; and, likewise, this collaborative practice opens opportunities for community engagement to incorporate more public action as an ongoing part of the process of public deliberation as students get involved in real-world community settings.

**Toward Collaborative Engagement**

“Deliberative democracy challenges academic institutions at every level: from the nature of teaching and the character of the extracurricular program to the very meaning of scholarship,” writes David Mathews (Mathews 2009, 13). Deliberative democracy also offers higher education an example of the type of civic innovation needed for colleges and universities to address the complex challenges facing communities.

Almost twenty years ago, Barr and Tagg articulated an important conceptual shift in teaching and learning—from an Instructional to a Learning Paradigm—that is taking shape across the landscape of higher education. This moves campuses from institutions that exist to provide instruction to institutions that exist to provide learning. With the learning-centered approach, they write, the college’s purpose serves “not to transfer knowledge but to create environments and experiences that bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves, to make students members of communities of learning that make discoveries and solve problems” (Barr and Tagg 1995, 15). And yet as a growing number of campus programs make clear, when deliberative pedagogy takes place outside the classroom, it recognizes an essential aspect to the learner-centered paradigm that is often invisible: the community.

In looking at Providence College’s example of deliberative pedagogy in the community, it seems we may be seeing the emergence of the next paradigm that goes beyond the more linear teacher-learner dichotomy still dominant even among the most well-intentioned adherents to the learning paradigm. The next generation of engaged
teaching and learning, it would seem, will more fully incorporate the ecology of educational opportunities available to students in a global and digital world, including community and community institutions. Building on these insights, the Next Generation Engagement Project sponsored by the New England Resource Center for Higher Education has begun to argue that reciprocal, co-creative engagement is the foundation for a new framework for teaching and learning, what might be termed “collaborative engagement.”

The emergence of this new collaborative paradigm is partly the result of significant cultural transformations, especially the advent and adaptation of innovative technologies that have revolutionized the ways in which people communicate, work, and learn. This idea, however, also echoes the writing from educational figures, such as John Dewey, who believed that knowledge and learning are most effective when people work collaboratively to solve specific, real world problems. “Thinking,” he wrote, “begins in . . . a forked road situation, a situation which is ambiguous, which presents a dilemma, which poses alternatives” (Dewey 1910, 11). But to really be immersed in these kinds of forked-road situations with others most often requires going outside the boundaries of the classroom, involving the community as reciprocal partners and co-educators.

This approach means not only recognizing new places for learning, but also recognizing the need for new connections to be made. Thus, in order to fully develop and implement a new paradigm for teaching and learning, we need to be, well, even more collaborative. This asks us to practice collaborative engagement by breaking the disciplining silos that engulf even reform movements in higher education, a call for connecting academic learning with community engagement and deliberative dialogue. In short, we need to do even more talking—and collective acting—in the community.

REFERENCES


CONTRIBUTORS

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