

Hoyt, L. (Ed.). (2013). *Transforming cities and minds through the scholarship of engagement: Economy, equity, and environment*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press. 264 pp.

Review by Matthew Hartley

On the one hand, *Transforming Cities and Minds Through the Scholarship of Engagement* is a thoughtful series of inquiries into some of the challenges facing our urban areas, especially the “forgotten cities” that emerged and flourished in times of industrial growth and whose fortunes waned as the economy changed, bringing unemployment, crime, and an attenuation of the social fabric. On the other hand, the book also describes a remarkable collaboration that emerged between a faculty member (and editor of the volume), Lorlene Hoyt, and a group of six graduate students affiliated with M.I.T.’s Community Innovator’s Lab (CoLab). Hoyt’s idea was to establish an inquiry community that would provide ongoing support for students as they completed their studies in urban planning so that they could not only satisfy their master’s thesis requirements but also produce scholarship that would serve the community partners with whom they worked. The results of these efforts are striking. *Transforming Cities and Minds Through the Scholarship of Engagement* demonstrates the kind of academic work that is possible when students engage in collaborative, community-based research that aims not just to diagnose problems (which universities excel at) but to suggest productive ways forward.

In the introductory chapter, Hoyt describes the context from which the project grew. Given the prodigious and complex challenges facing American cities, she argues that producing meaningful change requires the expertise of both city planners and the people who live and work in our urban neighborhoods. Such reciprocal partnering allows for a deeply contextual and nuanced examination of urban life and is the best means of arriving at workable solutions. As Hoyt puts it, “The guiding principles of democratic engagement are created, tested, and recalibrated locally in response to ever-changing conditions” (p. 2).

Hoyt also offers a thoughtful reflection on her own experience taking on this work as an untenured faculty member at a research university. Despite M.I.T.’s storied history, including Kurt Lewin’s pathbreaking work on action research in the 1940s and Don Schön’s influential vision of a “new epistemology” that would move beyond the limits of experimental design and embrace forms of research that grapple with the complexities and uncertainties

of the real world, Hoyt found an environment ambivalent toward (and at times opposed to) her and her students' efforts. Hoyt succeeded, however, in drawing six graduate students into a collaborative project whose goal was to reimagine the master's thesis. Hoyt writes, "Once I lured them into taking part, these students approached an old problem—how to write a thesis that won't end up ignored and forgotten—through what we came to call the scholarship of engagement" (p. 6).

Hoyt explores the idea that effecting change requires cultivating deep, sustained civic cooperation and collaboration involving local government, nonprofit organizations, big and small businesses, and the citizenry. A particularly intriguing concept Hoyt introduces is the notion of "rooted institutions," organizations that provide jobs, make investments in the community, and understand the local ecology. As the other chapters in the book illustrate (though the other authors do not reference the term), rooted institutions—whether they are large or small—have the capacity to serve as centers of gravity in communities caught in the centrifugal force of economic change. That these institutions can play such a role is an insightful and useful concept alongside the notion of "eds and meds" serving as "anchor institutions." Indeed, for some of our forgotten cities, smaller rooted institutions may be promising partners in change where no large anchor institutions exist.

Hoyt argues that urban planners must address three key issues in order to produce meaningful change: the economy, equity, and the environment. This concept provides an effective organizing framework for the book. In Part 1, "Engaging Economy," the chapter authors examine the role of small businesses in the economic development of Camden, New Jersey and efforts to apply ideas from the economic development model of Mondragon, Spain to Cleveland, Ohio, especially the notion of reinvesting local dollars. Part 2, "Engaging Equity," explores the histories of racial discrimination and systematic disinvestment in communities in Kansas City, Missouri, and Lawrence, Massachusetts and how these legacies continue today. Part 3, "Engaging Environment," explores efforts to create sustainable cities.

In the final chapter, Hoyt reflects on her experience as the leader of this inquiry community and on her work with these students. Hoyt argues that a "new epistemology" is needed to produce knowledge that leads to change in the world as well as changes in how we conduct graduate education. She describes with courage and honesty the challenges of the collaboration. For example, when Hoyt first met with students to propose the idea of producing an

edited volume, “[t]he response was lukewarm” (p. 215). The projects themselves were challenging. Committing to address pressing problems meant ceding some control over the topics the students took on. The time needed to accomplish the project was substantial and required numerous meetings, including “miniretreats” that gave the participants the opportunity to share their analyses with one another and to identify emerging themes across their work. One limitation of the chapter is that it provides few insights into the perspectives from the other group members, beyond brief quotes. This is Hoyt’s story. She lays out with candor her unsuccessful effort to convince colleagues in her department that her tenure case was “an opportunity to reignite a productive conversation, among faculty both inside and outside of our department, about the promise and consequences of introducing an epistemology of reciprocal knowledge into a renowned research university like M.I.T.” (p. 229). The department voted not to seek external review of her scholarship, thereby ending her tenure process.

However, Hoyt’s vision of the kind of graduate work and scholarship that might be possible is embodied in this volume. The chapters offer careful and nuanced discussions of the challenges facing these urban communities. In some instances, the recommendations offered by the chapter authors are perhaps a bit general. For example, one advocates the establishment of a network so organizations can discuss issues of mutual interest and to help create a more forceful voice within the city. But how this is to be accomplished remains unspecified. However, this reader had to continually remind himself that these chapters are revised master’s theses—overall, the quality of the analysis and the writing are impressive. They reveal the relationships that these authors were able to develop with people in the community during the course of conducting their work. As a whole, the volume offers an impressive contribution to the literature on the scholarship of engagement and a powerful vindication of Hoyt’s dream of remaking graduate education.

About the Reviewer

Matthew Hartley is a professor at the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education. His research focuses on how colleges and universities define and seek to realize their educational purposes and the role of universities in advancing democracy. Hartley earned his master’s degree and Ed.D. from Harvard’s Graduate School of Education.

