

Reardon, K., & Forester, J. (Eds.). (2015). *Rebuilding community after Katrina: Transformative education in the New Orleans planning initiative*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. 296 pp.

Review by Renee C. Zientek

In a time when many communities face crises caused by such challenges as natural disaster, failing infrastructure, and environmental catastrophe, the timing could not be better for scholars to share their promising practices for working together with communities to address such situations. Colleges and universities across the United States have committed significant human and financial resources to the public purposes of higher education, and over the last decade the understanding and practice of community-engaged scholarship has expanded. Practices of community-based participatory research and community-engaged teaching and learning have emerged in ways that are as intentional about community outcomes as they are about scholarly and student learning outcomes. According to Darrah and Smith (2010), the movement from project-based to partnership-based work with communities is the future direction of this type of scholarship (p. 140), and many have come to regard the role that partners and students play in the cogeneration of knowledge and solutions as being as important to the successful outcomes of collaborations as the role of faculty members. *Rebuilding Community After Katrina: Transformative Education in the New Orleans Planning Initiative*, edited by Ken Reardon and John Forester, tells the story of how three higher education institutions, community partners, and residents worked collectively to develop a plan for rebuilding and renewal in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

The book is divided into four parts that span from the invitation to partner through reflections on the process, learning, and partnering. The editors create a space for the story to be told from various perspectives, including those of students, residents, community partners, and faculty members from three different institutions. The discussion of each perspective offers different learnings and reflections. The authors and editors address the role of higher education partners in working with communities of which they are not members. They also address the added dimension of working with communities that are in crisis and require both immediate and long-term solutions. The partnerships, as described from varying viewpoints in this book, effectively address such key elements of service-learning partnerships as being attentive to the community

partner's mission and vision, understanding the human dimension of the community partner's work, being mindful of the community partner's resources, accepting and sharing responsibility for inefficiencies, considering the legacy of the partnership, and regarding process as important (*Tinkler, Tinkler, Hausman, & Tufo Strauss, 2014*).

Scholars may glean from this collection of writings the complexity of multiple disciplines, institutions, partners, and residents converging in a shared space to work collectively to solve problems in a time of crisis. Readers will learn that partnerships may change significantly once under way, in aspects ranging from who is involved to how issues of trust and contradictory approaches are negotiated. For example, during the time of the collective work at the core of this volume, the major community partner organization that had invited the university partners in the first place was dissolved. The dissolution came as a result of the organization's work on an unrelated project, but that change in partner involvement had the potential to derail the entire effort.

The volume makes effective use of the executive summary of *The People's Plan for Overcoming the Hurricane Katrina Blues: A Comprehensive Strategy for Building a More Vibrant, Sustainable, and Equitable Ninth Ward*, and *Photodocumentary of Returning Ninth Ward Residents* by Brian Rosa, assistant professor of urban studies at Queens College, City University of New York. Both are products of the partnership work and excellent demonstrations of the countless hours of interviews, surveys, community service, public meetings, and community-building effort of this partnership.

The book confirms some of the best partnership practices and reveals some new insights. It addresses how community organizers and community planners use different processes and approaches to solve the same problems, and how both are necessary for community success and vitality. It also underscores the importance of planning, knowing the history of a community, understanding the existing relationships and politics, and the requirement of addressing issues of inclusion and institutional racism. Newer insights and reflections featured in the book include presenting students as full members of partnerships and not merely free labor for community organizations. Additionally, the book emphasizes that faculty need to be active in the field in order to experience what partners and students are experiencing and to embrace the teachable moments afforded by those experiences.

Reardon and Forester and the chapter authors do an excellent job describing the work of this partnership by detailing the evolution of the partners, the engagement with residents, the products created by the partnership, and the multidimensional reflections offered by faculty, students, community partners, and residents. In the afterword, authors Hayes and Rumbach note that they are not able to offer a singular method for simplifying the challenges of university–community engagement. Nonetheless, the goal of the contributors, to offer “critically constructive reflections” on their partnership work in the hope of informing themselves and others about the opportunities and challenges of future partnership work, was effectively met.

References

- Darrah, C. N., & Smith, K. P. (2010). From projects to partnership: Using ethnography to engage students. In A. Pelham & E. Sills (Eds.), *Promoting health and wellness in underserved communities: Multiple perspectives through service learning* (pp. 127–142). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Tinkler, A., Tinkler, B., Hausman, E., & Tufo Strauss, G. (2014). Key elements of service-learning partnerships from the perspective of community partners. *Partnerships: A Journal of Service-Learning and Civic Engagement*, 5(2), 137–152.

About the Reviewer

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