

Beckman, M., & Long, J. F. (Eds.). (2016). *Community-based research: Teaching for community impact*. Sterling, VA: Stylus. 360 pp.

Review by Miles A. McNall and Jessica V. Barnes-Najor

The territory of community-engaged (or, if you prefer, service-learning) student learning outcomes is well explored, and its major features have been mapped out (e.g., *Bringle & Steinberg, 2010*). Two domains of community-engaged learning are still relatively uncharted territory: the student learning outcomes and the community outcomes/impacts uniquely associated with community-based *research* (CBR) as an engaged-learning pedagogical strategy. In Beckman and Long's (2016) *Community-Based Research: Teaching for Community Impact*, the contours of these landscapes begin to emerge.

Beckman and Long's edited collection of five theoretical chapters and 13 case studies serves as an invaluable companion to Strand, Cutforth, Stoecker, Marullo, and Donohue's (2003) earlier work, *Community-Based Research in Higher Education: Principles and Practices*. Both books are essential reading for both those new to CBR as an engaged learning strategy and old hands seeking fresh ideas. Referenced by nearly every author in Beckman and Long, Strand et al.'s classic work provides comprehensive guidance on key elements of a CBR project, including forming and managing partnerships, designing and conducting research, employing CBR as a teaching strategy, and establishing administrative structures and practices to support CBR as a long-term commitment. Beckman and Long's book moves quickly through these preliminaries in a set of four tightly focused theoretical chapters to get to the heart of what makes this book such a valuable contribution to the field of engaged teaching and learning—a rich set of case studies that address key questions about CBR as a strategy for engaged teaching and learning: How can CBR serve as a tool to enhance student learning? What student learning outcomes are uniquely associated with CBR? How can CBR be structured to yield meaningful benefits for communities? How can CBR achieve a balance between enhanced student learning outcomes and meaningful benefits for communities? What opportunities and challenges should practitioners of CBR anticipate across various contexts of application? What structures and practices within institutions of higher education and communities are needed to support both student learning and community outcomes and impacts?

Part I of the book succinctly orients the reader to historical developments and key concepts in community-engaged schol-

arship and frameworks for organizing CBR to achieve a balance between student learning outcomes and community outcomes and impacts. In Chapter 2, Beckman and Wood present the community impact framework (CIF), which is composed of four principles designed to increase the likelihood that CBR projects will benefit communities: (1) organize a group committed to long-term action using an institutional design best suited to the nature of the work, (2) engage in goal setting and other planning activities, (3) involve a diverse set of participants needed to accomplish the group's goals, and (4) regularly review and revise strategies and outcomes.

Part II consists of a single theoretical chapter followed by nine case studies of successful efforts to balance the twin imperatives of student learning and community benefit. In Chapter 5, Jennifer Pizga introduces the POWER model (partnership, objectives, working, evaluation, reflection), which serves both as a simple mnemonic device for teaching CBR and as a framework for planning and implementing CBR projects. Chapters 6 through 14 illustrate the broad variations possible in the application of CBR as a pedagogical strategy in terms of the types of institutions of higher education (IHEs) and community partners involved, the focal problem or issue addressed, and the particular engaged teaching and learning strategy used.

It is interesting that, with the exceptions of the University of Notre Dame and the University of Wisconsin–Madison, a majority of the case studies in Part II were written by faculty at small private liberal arts colleges. Upending the image of liberal arts colleges as nestled within bucolic campuses that isolate them physically and intellectually from the concerns of their surrounding communities, these case studies reveal that many liberal arts colleges are working closely with their surrounding communities to tackle problems of central concern to those communities. The overwhelming majority of community partners in these cases were small local nonprofit organizations whose work focuses on a wide range of issues, including supporting parent engagement in children's schooling, increasing access to fresh local foods, eliminating domestic violence, and reducing lead exposure in children.

The particular engaged teaching and learning strategies employed in these cases are somewhat less varied than their contexts of application. All involved students in some combination of the typical activities of CBR—identifying community concerns; background library research on the issue; gathering, analyzing, summarizing, and interpreting data; presenting findings and recommendations to partners; and reflecting on the implications of

the findings for next steps. The particular curricular structures in which these activities were organized were also very similar. Most cases (seven of nine) involved a single discipline-based course, although there were a few instances of courses, such as action research, that cut across disciplines. Less commonly, students progressed through a sequence of courses, with a CBR project serving as a capstone or senior thesis project. The most elaborate of these sequences, presented by Persichetti, Sturman, and Gingerich in Chapter 13, was the 4-year sequence of Engagement with the Common Good courses at Cabrini College, where students spend the first year exploring their personal beliefs and backgrounds, the second year completing service with a community partner, the third year working toward sustainable structural change through CBR and advocacy projects, and the fourth year developing a capstone project through which students integrate what they have learned with their personal and professional interests.

Part III consists of four case studies of engaged-learning CBR projects that took place within larger long-term efforts aimed at community-wide effects. Here, the IHE partners were more evenly balanced between small liberal arts colleges and large research universities, demonstrating that both kinds of IHEs are involved in long-term large-scale efforts. In Chapter 17, Anthony Vinciguerra describes the Global Solidarity Partnership between St. Thomas University, a small urban Catholic college in Miami Gardens, Florida, and Port-de-Paix, Haiti. This partnership involved establishing fair/direct trade projects between the United States and Haiti for Haitian coffee and artisanal products, as well as a solar energy initiative for a rural impoverished region of Haiti. In Chapter 15, Don Dailey and David Dax describe how Washington and Lee University engaged communities in Rockbridge County, Virginia in a long-term poverty initiative that led to the establishment of a poverty commission and ultimately to changes in local policies.

As noted previously, the book offers two simple frameworks for planning engaged-learning CBR projects—Beckman and Wood's CIF in Chapter 2 and Pizga's POWER model in Chapter 5—that are designed to help IHEs and their community partners collaborate to achieve the twin goals of enhanced student learning and community outcomes and impacts. Because the book presents 13 case studies that document successful efforts to do just that, it is worth pausing to reflect on what a remarkable accomplishment this is. After all, balancing benefits to IHEs and communities has long been recognized as a major challenge for the field of community-engaged scholarship (Minkler, 2005; Wilson, Kenny, &

Dickson-Swift, 2017). That so many IHE–community partnerships have accomplished this is worth celebrating. One hopes that this is an indication of the increasing maturity and capability of the field of community-engaged scholarship.

As program evaluators, we found it heartening to read that evaluation is a key element of both the CIF and POWER models and, as we reviewed the case studies throughout the book, the prominence of evaluation in these models drew our attention to questions about what was being evaluated and how. Judging from the details provided in the case studies, many of the CBR efforts appear to have lacked formal evaluations. Furthermore, most case descriptions did not provide sufficient details to independently judge the rigor of efforts to evaluate student learning outcomes or community outcomes and impacts. That is understandable. The addition of such details would have yielded a book of forbidding length. Indeed, one of the strengths of the case studies is their conciseness, which allows for a very broad range of examples of CBR applied in a variety of contexts to be presented in a single volume of manageable length.

Nevertheless, elements that could have been evaluated and succinctly reported include partnerships, processes, early project outputs (e.g., research reports), student learning outcomes, and community outcomes/impacts. In Part II, which is focused on projects striving to achieve both student and community outcomes, the reporting of project outputs, student learning outcomes, and community outcomes/impacts is about evenly balanced: Roughly two thirds of case studies report all three. However, given the prominence of partnerships in the CIF and POWER models, it is surprising that none of the case studies in Part II report assessments of partnerships or processes. After all, it is difficult to achieve intended outcomes and impacts when partnerships and/or processes are flawed. In Part III, which comprises case studies of long-term efforts to achieve community impact, although project outputs and community outcomes and impacts are consistently reported, efforts to evaluate partnerships, processes, or student learning outcomes appear to have been rare, with one exception: Chapter 16 describes a thematic dissertation group focused on the concept of coconstruction among IHE and community partners.

Given the centrality of community outcomes and impacts to the CIF and POWER models, it would seem that greater attention might also have been paid to two vexing issues: the well-known challenges of achieving community change (*Kubisch, Auspos, Brown, Buck, & Dewar, 2011*) and the difficulty of attributing any given

community outcome or impact to a particular project or initiative (Gates, 2016), especially under the circumstances described in Part III, where CBR was embedded within larger long-term community-wide efforts. Welcome follow-ups to this volume might more directly address three issues. The first is the challenge of achieving community outcomes and impacts through CBR when employed as a pedagogical strategy. We believe the challenge of doing this is somewhat underplayed in this book, although Bartel and Nigro do raise the issue briefly in Chapter 8. Because such efforts sometimes fail, the field needs to provide guidance on what to do in such circumstances. The second is strategies for assessing CBR partnerships and processes; several tools for assessing partnerships are readily available (e.g., Butterfoss, 1998; Oetzel et al., 2015). The third is appropriate evaluation designs for assessing outcomes and impacts of CBR projects. In contexts such as those described in Part III, where causal attribution is a particular challenge and contribution analysis (Mayne, 2012) may be a more sensible strategy, alternatives to experimental and quasi-experimental designs for documenting outcomes and impacts—including outcome mapping (Earl & Carden, 2002), outcome harvesting (Wilson-Grau & Britt, 2012), ripple effects Mapping (Rani, Templin, Messer, & Chazdon, 2017), and the most significant change method (Davies & Dart, 2005)—might be considered.

Despite these minor quibbles, we highly recommend Beckman and Long's (2016) *Community-Based Research: Teaching for Community Impact*, both to those who are new to CBR as an engaged learning strategy and to experienced practitioners who are seeking fresh ideas. The pairing of two concise theoretical frameworks for planning and conducting CBR projects—the community impact framework and the POWER model—with several case studies involving different settings, diverse issues, and various pedagogical models achieves two important objectives. First, it gives readers a strong sense of the potential power of CBR as an engaged learning strategy that is capable of simultaneously enriching the student learning experience and producing meaningful benefits for community partners. Second, it gives readers sufficient grounding in the realities of CBR as an engaged learning strategy to make informed choices about how to design their own efforts. As a follow-up to this excellent volume, we call for the articulation of frameworks that are suited to evaluating the partnerships, processes, outputs, student learning outcomes, and community outcomes/impacts uniquely associated with CBR. The use of such frameworks and the more routine reporting of evalu-

ation results will help move the field of CBR in the direction of evidence-informed practice and enhanced student and community outcomes/impacts.

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