

W. M. Sullivan and M. S. Rosin. *A New Agenda for Higher Education: Shaping a Life of the Mind for Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008. 242 pp. \$40.00 (cloth). ISBN: 978-0-470-25757-9.

Reviewed by Tami L. Moore

Fifteen faculty representing the liberal arts and sciences and the professions participated in *Life of the Mind for Practice*, a seminar convened by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in 2002–2003. Participants identified new pedagogical approaches for use across the disciplines, and began to articulate a new agenda for higher education. The aim of this new approach is to help students develop a “life of the mind *for practice*,” which the seminar participants defined as “critical (or analytical) thinking *through* lived situations that demand action with and on behalf of others” (*emphasis in the original*, p. 91). William Sullivan and Matthew Rosin report on the outcomes of this seminar in *A New Agenda for Higher Education*, which extends a comparative study by Lee Shulman and others at Carnegie exploring education in the professions. The authors present profiles of seminar participants as exemplars of this new approach, delivering a volume that is simultaneously critique, manifesto, and handbook for the practice of “a pedagogy of practical reason” (p. xii).

While Sullivan and Rosin frame their work as a “new model of undergraduate teaching,” practitioners of community-engaged scholarship will also be interested in what the authors have to say about grounding scholarship in theory and practice, and teaching students about the necessity of both for their professional development. This is also the realm of the community-engaged scholar, drawing connections between the formal knowledge of her academic field and the lived experiences of communities. Highlighting this similarity points out the relevance of this book for engaged scholars, scholars of engagement, graduate professional educators, and faculty development program administrators, any of whom may draw evocative insights and practical examples from it.

The book follows an inductive outline reflecting the pedagogy of practical reason: empirical examples first, followed by an explication of the associated or resulting theory, and culminating in a richer sense of how and why to practice what has been learned. Shulman and Fenstermacher’s foreword frames the book in the context of the larger research agenda of the Carnegie Foundation. The authors’ preface explores the current agenda in higher education and its focus on critical thinking as an introduction to Carnegie’s *Life of the Mind* seminar. The introduction outlines the

authors' new model for teaching, one that takes up "the challenge of placing the formation of lives of reasoned action at the center of the educational mission" (p. xviii) of higher education. Chapters 1 and 2 introduce participants in the Life of the Mind seminar, reproducing course syllabi and discussing individual assignments as examples of their pedagogical approach (see appendix 1 for sample syllabi). Sullivan and Rosin examine the underlying pedagogical principles in these courses, including congruence between cultural and communicative concerns, and the reimagining of education for the global workplace. Education of this sort, emphasizing practical reasoning, "concerns the formation and pursuit of meaning through action" (p. 77).

The seminar was convened as "a shared consideration of how best to teach practical reasoning within the modern academy" (p. 75; see appendix 2 for an outline of seminar activities), and chapter 3 chronicles the seminar experience. In their final gathering, seminar participants articulated four topics to focus the teaching of practical reasoning: identity, community, bodies of knowledge, and responsibility. "Identity" refers to the shaping of self through interaction with one's professional community and the world at large. Together, "community" and "bodies of knowledge" function to "discern what is salient for deliberation and action with others in [a particular] place and time" (p. 89). Discussions of "responsibility" emphasize ethical conduct grounded in a commitment to the varying publics being served. Addressing each of these dimensions reinforces the symbiosis of liberal and professional education: "only by becoming familiar with how a particular field understands [these dimensions of professional practice] is it possible for students to develop . . . professional expertise" (p. 109). Chapter 4 outlines the implications of a new agenda focused on practical reasoning. Most obvious is the concomitant need to rebuild institutional cultures that encourage and sustain the dialogue necessary to prioritize and support pedagogies for practical reason.

In the conclusion, the authors offer a "call to action" (p. 128) to address the inherent challenge of implementing this new agenda by outlining what is possible through and who must be involved in shaping institutional conditions for faculty formation aimed at "sustaining and deepening dialogue" about a new approach to education. The authors identify this challenge as developmental, institutional, dialogic, and situated, and offer recommendations for addressing each perspective. These efforts must necessarily involve faculty, graduate students, deans and chief academic officers, and

campus centers of teaching and learning, so Sullivan and Rosin also give attention to the benefits for each group.

Seminar participants, and the authors, use the term “engagement” frequently, always in reference to student engagement with learning or course material vis-à-vis the work of Kuh (2001) and associates on the National Survey of Student Engagement (*see also Carini, Kuh, and Klein 2006*). They use the term “community” to refer to an affinity group focused on discipline or profession more than to a geographic location. “Real world” problems representing constituents external to the university are primarily addressed in practical reasoning learning experiences through case studies; service-learning or community-based research is sometimes part of the experience if faculty have a particular interest in this approach. Direct interaction with constituents external to the university is not a requisite part of the pedagogy for practical reason. Despite this focus on student learning or engagement, Sullivan and Rosin’s work will be of interest to the community-engaged scholar and teacher because of the natural connection between the praxis approach of community-engaged teaching and research and the linking of theory and practice by the Carnegie seminar participants.

One caveat on this point: As befits the book’s purpose, there is no specific discussion about how to foreground (geographically defined) communities’ contributions to teaching for practical reasoning. The first two chapters repeatedly highlight the importance of “context,” here meaning the professional community. However, contextualizing the new agenda also requires specific attention to the geographic location where the professional’s work is done. Accordingly, in keeping with commonly cited definitions of community-university engagement, some care should be taken in extending this model to inform thinking about community-engaged scholarship and teaching that embraces mutually beneficial relationships. Even with this caveat, the variety of applications for the practical reasoning agenda recommend *A New Agenda* to anyone interested in strengthening the connections between theory and practice in their scholarly work. This is the considerable strength of the work: It presents many opportunities to think about teaching and research moving beyond disciplinary expertise to engaging with communities in the production of knowledge.

Beyond the focus on linking theory and practice, seminar participants share another common experience with community-engaged scholar-practitioners in that their scholarly and pedagogical practice exists on the margins of their discipline and of the academy in general (*Moore and Ward 2008*):

Each . . . provide[s] his or her students with a guided introduction to responsible engagement in a field of practice. . . . In the process, each . . . works against the grain of academic institutions that tend to value generalized argument over practical reasonableness and the integration of knowing and acting. Each works to sustain a broader conception of his or her own responsibilities in the lives of students and the public. (pp. 73–74)

The seminar modeled an antidote for the marginalizing tendency of the dominant discourse of critical thinking by creating opportunities to establish community and build common language around teaching for practical reason. This approach harkens to the communities of practice concept (Wenger 1998), which has been used to good effect by community-engaged scholars on particular campuses in the past and continues to hold promise for the future of this work.

Sullivan and Rosin's report on the seminar offers a new way to think about teaching, in the tradition of Boyer's (1990) *Scholarship Reconsidered*. Boyer gave the academy a new vocabulary and a broadened conception of scholarship; *A New Agenda* has similar potential to synergize efforts both in the scholarship of teaching and learning and in the scholarships of discovery and engagement, which can support faculty and institutions in "a renewed and sustained reflection toward the future lives of our students and our diverse publics" (p. 143).

References

- Boyer, E. L. 1990. *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Carini, R. M., G. D. Kuh, and S. P. Klein. 2006. Student engagement and student learning: Testing the linkages. *Research in Higher Education* 47 (1): 1–32.
- Kuh, G. D. 2001. Assessing what really matters to student learning: Inside the National Survey of Student Engagement. *Change* 33 (3): 10–17, 66.
- Moore, T. L., and K. A. Ward. 2008. Documenting engagement: Faculty perspectives on self representation for promotion and tenure. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 12 (4): 5–28.
- Wenger, E. 1998. *Communities of practices, learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

About the Reviewer

- Tami L. Moore is assistant professor of higher education in the Educational Leadership Program at Oklahoma State University–Tulsa. Her research explores the role of the university and its faculty in society, employing social and critical theory in the reading of community engagement.