

Angie Hart, Elizabeth Maddison, and David Wolff, eds. *Community-University Partnerships in Practice*. Leicester, UK: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), 2007. 224 pages. ISBN: 978-1-86201-317-9.

Community-University Partnerships in Practice

Review by James M. Frabutt

There are those who learn best by first taking hold of abstract principles and subsequently linking them to an everyday reality. Other learners are best engaged by concrete examples and realistic situations that are then extrapolated to theoretical and conceptual understanding. This latter approach guides the editors and contributors of *Community-University Partnerships in Practice* as they describe the development, emergence, and sustainability of collaborative efforts between the University of Brighton (United Kingdom) and the surrounding community. The text traces the unfolding of a partnership for civic engagement known as the Community-University Partnership Programme (Cupp) from its inception in 2003.

Readers will appreciate the orderly and stepwise progression of the book's layout, proceeding as it does from contextual information about the founding, initiation, and launching of Cupp with primary funding from the Atlantic Philanthropies. The text continues through a series of chapters summarizing specific partnership projects, often written by coauthors from the community and the academy, and concludes with three chapters that take a retrospective, evaluative, and lessons-learned approach to framing the Cupp body of work.

The initial chapters are well-crafted in that they are anchored in the community-university partnerships literature and make explicit reference to the primary tenets of community-based participatory research (CBPR). At the outset, the authors define the notion of engagement with particular attention to how engagement has been embraced and applied in the United Kingdom. What is lacking, however, from these initial orienting chapters is any substantive exposition on the University of Brighton itself and its surrounding community. International readers, in particular, who are unfamiliar with the university and the region, are left to piece together contextual observations from later chapters to derive a picture of the local milieu. How large is the university? What are its areas of academic strength? What social challenges are most

pressing in the surrounding community and what is the nature of the community's strongest assets and resources? A brief overview of that type of information at the outset would allow readers not only to understand the developmental trajectory of Cupp, but to discern whether and to what extent the book's examples relate to their own situation.

The central section of the volume aligns several chapters that describe Cupp's research and practice partnerships in action. These topics run the gamut from refugees' access to higher education (*Conlan, Silverwood, and Woolmer*); neighborhood renewal (*MacDonald, Mullineux, Hardsman, and Balloch*); the needs of homeless lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth (*Cull and Platzer*); and community-based architecture projects emanating from the School of Architecture and Design (*Viljoen et al.*). The exemplars featured in the book underscore some of the best practices of well-conceived and well-executed community-based research. Morrise, Addise, Shaafi, and Woolridge recount their efforts to conduct "insider research" among refugees, giving voice to refugees themselves in the design, execution, and application of the project. The seamless integration of university students into community-based research and practice is featured as well. Ridley and Fox describe the Access to Art project, wherein undergraduates and students with learning disabilities worked side-by-side to hone artistic skills and abilities. Where appropriate in this section, readers outside the United Kingdom are provided enough policy and/or historical context to understand the positioning of the projects. In each chapter, authors are to be commended for framing the lessons learned in a straightforward and direct manner. One chapter, for example, features an interrogative dialogue between the two coauthors (one community-based, the other a university partner) about how each contributor built the other's capacity for reflective research and practice (*Cull and Platzer*). In this chapter, as in several throughout the book, community voices are melded with the academic perspective; their inclusion is not an add-on but rather reflects the challenging "collective endeavor" of these projects (*Hart, Maddison, and Wolff, p. 6*). Considered together, these chapters highlight the deft choreography involved in discerning which partner (university or community) leads on a given project, and when the other partner must step forward and take the lead, reversing roles and altering the power dynamics.

This middle section of the book reads like a series of case studies, each encapsulating the co-learning and knowledge exchange that transpired. When reviewing case studies, it is often more useful to

study the negative case, where the expected outcomes did not materialize, than it is to study the standard case. This text capitalizes on that dynamic by articulating not only successes, but those projects that struggled. For example, Ambrose, McLaughlin, Whittle, and Young reflected on the numerous challenges encountered in their evaluation of an extended school program (a too-aggressive time line, difficulty recruiting researchers, an inappropriate survey instrument, etc.), noting that “all . . . are clear that they have learned a lot from what went wrong” (p. 128). That kind of forthright sharing is imbued with great learning potential for readers who want to understand both the triumphs and the tribulations of engaged scholarship.

The final group of three chapters reviews the key success factors for community-university partnerships, major learnings derived from an external evaluation of Cupp, and a vision for future steps. Practitioners involved in community-university partnerships will find in chapter fourteen a workable and useful framework that examines partnerships along seven dimensions. In the last chapter, the editors provide a thorough and realistic critique of Cupp’s considerable work thus far, surfacing challenges that are relevant to other institutions that seek to nurture long-term community engagement. For instance, the editors point out issues of scalability—how Cupp should best frame its future growth, so breadth is gained without sacrificing depth and high-quality partnerships. One challenge surmounted at the University of Brighton was the institutionalization of the university’s fiscal support for Cupp’s efforts. With that dedicated funding, however, comes an even more pressing need to demonstrate programwide efficacy, so additional challenges lie in broadening and diversifying measurements of impact. A final challenge described by the editors centers on how to represent initiatives like these as a sustainable, cohesive whole rather than a series of projects.

Perhaps the most striking observation about this text is the sense that the authors and contributors have presented a very “real” account of the challenges and rewards of community-university engagement. It is not promotional and self-aggrandizing, but rather appropriately reflective, self-critical, and yet forward looking. The contributors seem to know that the work, while serious, must not be taken too seriously. At one point, Hart and Aumann espouse a tongue-in-cheek attitude toward the stereotypes inherent in community-university work: “Aristotelian capital sounds a bit pompous, and you can blame the university partner for thinking of it” (p. 175). In an account so grounded, however, more detail could have been

provided about the inner workings—the nuts and bolts—of the operational nature of Cupp. For example, while there is clearly institutional support at Brighton for this kind of work, are new scholars and pretenure faculty engaged? How are other logistics and costs handled, such as the salary buyout of the university academic codirectors of Cupp? How have structures at the university itself evolved, such as human subjects review boards, since the inception of increased engagement through Cupp? Despite these unanswered questions, readers of *Community-University Partnerships in Practice* will gain insight and appreciation for one university's cohesive efforts to build and sustain a culture of engagement. As the editors note, rich meaning is found “in the doing” (p. 169), an appreciation of which enlightens how communities and institutions of higher education can engage one another in satisfying, mutually beneficial ways.

About the Reviewer

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