A Case for Community: Starting with Relationships and Prioritizing Community as Method in Service-Learning

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This paper describes an eight-year service-learning experiment that created four distinct spaces in which campus and community members meet, reflect, and act together. This work explores the tensions between traditional and critical service-learning, and points to the importance of building relationships with members of local communities and nurturing shared community as a way for service-learning to begin realizing its civic engagement and social justice objectives. It addresses issues of power and meaning making. It presents a theory of community that suggests the connections between civic engagement and social justice with the practices of hospitality, compassion, listening, and reflection across social and cultural boundaries.

Higher education service-learning is at an interesting conceptual crossroad. On the one hand, it has become more professionalized and institutionalized, paying careful attention to principles informing the field since the Wingspread Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning (Porter, Honnet, & Poulsen, 1989), and arguably achieving its longer-term goal of inspiring students to stay involved in their communities after graduation (Mitchell, Battistoni, Rost-Banik, Netz, & Zakoske, 2015; Soria & Thomas-Card, 2014). On the other hand, there is increasing doubt that service-learning is achieving its democratic and social justice outcomes for students and communities (Kliewer, 2013; Meens, 2014; Mitchell, 2008; Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009). These contradicting viewpoints, along with the language of "traditional" and "critical" service-learning used to frame the latest discussions, recall earlier arguments in the service-learning literature that differentiated "moving students from charity to justice," or inviting them to discover, reflect on, and deepen their orientation to "charity, project, and change" understandings of service (Morton, 1995).

One of the possibilities raised and left unexamined from these earlier arguments and also relevant in today's discussions continues to intrigue us: Do some forms of service have more potential for both personal and social change as well as transformation than others, or do "thick" practices of all forms of service contain the potential for change and transformation? A common denominator across "thick" forms of service seems to be the quality of the relationships at their center – relationships that recognize, respond to, and sometimes draw out what Palmer (2009) has called the "hidden wholeness" of persons and places.

In this article we describe the problem of why neither traditional nor critical service-learning alone can adequately address the aforementioned questions, discuss the undergirding philosophy of our work with communities, identify models informing that work, discuss and deconstruct the four initiatives we have undertaken to date, and offer an analysis of why we have achieved outcomes not customarily associated with traditional campus-community partnerships.

The Problem

Service-learning has been institutionalized at many colleges and universities over the last thirty years (Meens, 2014). The mainstream practice begins by connecting campus-based faculty, staff, and students with particular course learning objectives and community-based agencies – most often nonprofit organizations, K-12 schools, or government agencies – that can provide experiential, service-based opportunities related to the learning objectives (Jacoby, 2003). "Reflection" in this context is service-learning's short-hand term for what David Kolb (1983) has called the process of "transforming experience into knowledge" (p. 38), and is undertaken in a wide variety of ways (Eyler, 2002; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996). There is evidence that this basic approach is successful as a form of experiential education (Eyler; Moore, 2000). Community impacts, however, are less clear (Sandy & Holland, 2006), but are generally defined by the projects and programs of the higher education institution. In more sophisticated undertakings, community impacts are typically aligned with the objectives of both campus and community partners. Increasingly, service-learning practitioners give care-

ful attention to the voices of community partners to ensure that the campus is serving the community and not the other way around (D'Arlach, Sanchez, & Feurer, 2009; Gelmon, 2003).

The emergence of this more normative practice parallels an increasingly focused discussion of service-learning's impact on the civic engagement of students, alumni, and higher education institutions. A growing number of service-learning practitioners and scholars (Hartman, 2013; Kliewer, 2013; Meens, 2014; Mitchell, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2015; Saltmarsh et al., 2009) are concerned that service-learning experiences reinforce the values and perspectives of neoliberal culture by emphasizing personal over collective agency and treating public life and democracy as extensions of the marketplace. This more "traditional" strand of service-learning, Mitchell argues, "emphasizes service without attention to inequality." She offers the model of critical service-learning as an alternative – "unapologetic in its aim to dismantle structures of injustice" (p. 50).

Critical service-learning refocuses the service experiences of its participants and directs reflective practices toward social justice questions, and includes such approaches as asset-based community development (ABCD) (Hammerlinck & Plaut, 2014), participatory action research (Cooks, 2014; Giles, 2014; Lewis, 2004; Marullo & Edwards, 2000; Reardon & Shields, 1997; Shabazz & Lieberman, 2015; Stoecker, 2013), and activist community placements (Kajner, Chovanec, Underwood, & Mian, 2013). These critical approaches to service-learning share a number of values and goals: They require ongoing dialogue between campus and community partners, surface questions of position and power within the partnership and through the implicit and/or explicit goals of the host agency, focus attention on the structural dimensions of injustice, and direct student learning to the relationships among agency, power, and social change.

Unfortunately, this orientation to campus-community partnerships faces the challenge of continuing to position "the community as the domain of the problem and the college as the domain of the solution" (Yapa, 1996). It also faces the challenge of the potential for student participants to strongly disagree with the values of their host organization or the activity with which they are asked to engage (Giles, 2014). Both of these point toward the need for further study of "the factors and conditions that distinguish between situations in which students experience disorienting dilemmas as transformative and those in which they experience them as alienating …" (Giles, p. 77). Therefore, these critical service-learning approaches continue to be challenged by the structural inequalities existing between campuses and mar-

ginalized communities, and they tend to approach communities as something that can be improved by a service intervention rather than as places and people with their own histories, interests, and understandings of wholeness.

Undergirding Philosophy

When our experiment began in late 2007 we were only dimly aware of the shape it would take. We began with perplexities (Dewey, 1910) regarding community, civic engagement, and campus-community partnerships, and were committed to a process of action and reflection that would deepen our understanding of each. We wanted a strategy that we could practice with our community partners and use in our analysis of the larger project. We developed a method of reflection based upon Van Manen's (1990) "hermeneutic phenomenology." This method calls attention to relationships, conversation, and the self-conscious shared construction of meaning that can be used to shape future action. Van Manen writes,

> Phenomenological questions are meaning questions…Meaning questions cannot be "solved" and thus done away with…[they] can be better or more deeply understood, so that, on the basis of this understanding, I may be able to act more thoughtfully and more tactfully in certain situations. But in some sense, meaning questions can never be closed down. (p. 23)

Our experiment established four off-campus spaces in which campus and community members meet, talk, and consider what they might do next on the basis of their discussions. In these spaces we begin by listening together to the individual and collective stories that come out of the conversations, and talk about what the stories and the experiences behind them mean. Where meaning remains contested and interest strong, we set the stories alongside available data and literatures selected because of their relevance to the situations of the participants. This cross-referencing allows us to see where the stories, data, and literatures are aligned and where they diverge. Where they align, we find provisional theories and facts we can begin to lean on as we act; and where they diverge we have to decide what to do even as we continue to further reflect.

Van Manen's (1990) method also is "self-critical" and "intersubjective" (p. 11), concerned in equal parts with understanding what is being experienced or observed and understanding the ways that the perceptions of the participant and observer affect that understanding. It recognizes the challenge of simultaneously being in and analyzing a relationship or situation, and calls attention to shifts between personal and social perspectives as well as private and public

identities as people negotiate meaning. It is "the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experience" (p. 10).

Applied to the four projects and the experiment as a whole, the practice of hermeneutic phenomenology begins with writing about experience – an opportunity to begin considering and reconsidering meaning. Each of the projects in our experiment provides written reflective summaries to everyone involved about what has been said or has happened. These summaries are shared on a regular basis with larger "publics" made up of campus and community people involved in and affected by the particular space. In the longest running project, this has resulted in nearly 360 summaries over eight years. Additionally, one of us writes extensively in a reflective journal that contains approximately 500 pages of informal and formal notes thus far. Much of this material is subsequently revisited, sifted through for patterns and ideas, revised into more readable forms, and then shared with people involved as a basis for further discussion.

The spaces that constitute our experiment also are regularly made the subject of academic classes in several disciplines, and students use these classes to write about what they experience and the meaning of those experiences. Their writing is shared and talked about in classes and with others in the community spaces. Community members are invited to participate in and/or help teach the classes, and to visit and share their interpretations of what is discussed. Quite often campus and community members decide to act together based on what they have learned with one another. Finally, we articulate, formally and informally and in multiple media, our collective reflections, using them to move toward action, theory, and/or further discussion.

Models Informing Our Work

Fortunately, there are examples of critical service-learning that place relationships with and understanding of "the other" more than community impact at the center of practice. Pompa (2002), for example, placed her students in two correctional facilities, with activities that allowed students and prisoners to share their stories,

provid[ing] direct, unadulterated exposure to the exigencies of a particular context. This immersion engenders deeper interaction and involvement, often manifesting as a statement of solidarity with those who are struggling…What emerges is the possibility of considering the subject matter from a new context – that of those living within that context. (p. 68)

Where Pompa's students had to enter a space

designed to deny freedom, Steinman (2011) reimagined service as "making space", a concept drawn from his experience collaborating with First Nations. Tracing the roots of "making space" to reconciliation efforts between the Canadian government and First Nations, he notes the transformative potential of spaces that can "identify, denaturalize, and replace hegemonic power/knowledge regimes" (p. 5).

In yet another example informing our work, Ross (2012) also uses a metaphor of space to reconstruct her youth-work class as a "borderland in which individuals of different backgrounds and positions of power come together, actively engaged in producing new identities, knowledge and communities" (p. 60). Committed to putting community voice at the center of the learning process, she notes that borderlands are contested spaces, requiring special attention because of their potential for "struggle and injury" (p. 60).

These three models inform our experiment in space making intended to minimize the structural inequalities that influence higher education service-learning, and to work toward more authentic relationships with the people and places that constitute the local community.

Our experiment also has been informed and inspired by the work of the Jane Addams School for Democracy and Miami University's Center for Community Engagement in Over-the-Rhine. Located in St. Paul, Minnesota, the Jane Addams School for Democracy (Kari & Skelton, 2007) is:

a space for democratic education and practice for new immigrant families, college students and faculty. It was conceived as a democratic organization – one with minimal, nonhierarchical structures that would allow participants to shape its agenda…a vehicle for public work and social change. (p. 2)

It draws especially on Addams' work with immigrants and democracy at Hull House in Progressive-Era Chicago, the popular-education pedagogy of Myles Horton's Highlander Folk School, and "the practices of citizenship schools that helped catalyze the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s" (Kari & Skelton, p. 5). A participant describes it this way:

There are few places if any, in my life where I can develop relationships with such a diverse group of people…When people enter the circle…we remove all titles and labels. We are who we are. In this space, people have a sense of equality. Because we have such different lived experiences, everyone brings a needed perspective. This matters in a democracy. We have to be able to come into dialogue knowing how to tell our stories to others, to be able to say what we believe and why, and to hear each others' stories. (pp. 10-11)

Miami University's Center for Community Engagement in Over-the-Rhine describes its mission as providing "a site for learning and for producing knowledge that intersects with the needs of social movements in the inner city. Through social engagement our mission is to generate learning and knowledge among students, faculty, residents, and ultimately the community" (Miami University Center for Community Engagement, n.d.). The project draws on the 35-year relationship of its faculty founder, Timothy Dutton, with the Over-the-Rhine People's Movement, an organization focused on "the struggle for racial and human rights, and social justice" (Miami University Center for Community Engagement, n.d.). Drawing on the legacies of Jane Addams, community organizer Saul Alinsky, and community theorist John McKnight (Dutton & La Botz, 2008; Miami Center for Community Engagement in Over the Rhine, n.d.), the Center is conceived as a "community of practice" for both community and campus members and adheres to the tenet that "learning in support of broader community transformation is best served by direct social engagement." The Center is explicit about generating "learning and knowledge based upon social participation within a cultural community of color" (Miami University Center for Community Engagement, n.d.).

These two examples locate community in place, focus on relationships and crossing cultural boundaries, move nimbly between practices of traditional and critical service-learning, draw on the traditions of both deliberative and participatory democracy, and practice and teach reflection. They bring campus and community members together in various configurations that begin by offering participants hospitality and safe space and help them move toward acting in increasingly public and contested spaces. They are committed to the principle that the process of personal and social transformation begins with "making meaning."

This, then, is the framework of our experiment: redirecting our service-learning efforts toward making and participating in spaces that bring campus and community members together for conversation, reflection, and sometimes action. We believe that this approach offers an alternative to the binary of traditional and critical service-learning, and has implications for how service-learning in general approaches civic engagement and thinks about community.

The four spaces we will describe each synthesize different mixes of participatory and deliberative democratic practices, and move back and forth between the personal and the social articulation of meaning and agency. Our goal has been to better understand and articulate over time how forms of service-learning based on direct relationships and shared reflection can contribute to personal and social transformation and to people's understandings of themselves as engaged citizens in a democracy.

The Four Spaces

In a dynamic familiar to those in the service-learning community, campus and community members from Providence (PC) College and the local neighborhood tend to describe the campus as a "bubble" with a distinct boundary, and each has used this as a way of justifying its choices about its relationship with the other: students justify their noise, parties, and off-campus insensitivity by saying that the neighborhood "isn't a real community," and therefore there is no real harm done (notes of the author from a campus-neighborhood discussion, December 3, 2014). Residents, unless they have spent time with students, faculty, or staff in positive settings, note the fences and security that bound the campus, the assumed privilege of the students, and focus on the complications – noise, traffic, trash, competition for housing – that the campus introduces into their lives. Each side sees an "other" to which it can attribute blame.

To replace this dynamic with positive relationships and a shared sense of community, we have over time created four linked and ongoing service-learning projects: Rec Night, the PC/Smith Hill Annex, "The City and…," and Common Grounds Café. Located in the neighborhoods abutting Providence College, these initiatives de-center service in campus-community relationships, emphasize the creation of spaces where campus and community members can meet as equals to talk and reflect formally and informally, support the co-creation of knowledge by campus and community members as an antecedent to actions that may lead to personal growth and/or community improvement, and encourage the action that sometimes follows. The actions resulting from this shared reflection range from the personal to traditional forms of service, social enterprises, and participation in explicitly public acts of citizenship.

Rec Night

Our first project was Rec Night, and it taught us many of the lessons about community building and personal and social transformation that are at the heart of our other projects. A year-round, weekly, safe-space program, Rec Night was started in a neighborhood recreation center in 2008 as a partnership between the Institute for the Study and Practice of Nonviolence (ISPN), a Providence-based group that focuses on preventing and intervening in street and gang violence, and Providence College's Feinstein Institute for Public Service. Each semester, about 15 college students from a service-learning

class and 5 or more community volunteers join 80 participants for food, board games, basketball, and conversation. Most nights, the participants represent one or two gangs, two or three "crews" (less organized groups of 10 or so youth and young adults), and their friends and family. Rec Night began when an ISPN Streetworker, once a member of a local gang, asked one of us to help him and the gang-involved youth he worked with gain access to the rec center. The rec center director was hostile and resistant, and had expelled all of the youth because they were "bad kids." Getting and keeping access for the gang-involved youth was a constant political battle for nearly three years, and meant organizing a coalition that included one of the authors, ISPN staff, the Smith Hill Community Development Corporation staff, City Council representatives, police leadership, school leadership, City of Providence and Recreation Department leaders, Providence College students and Rec Night participants, and a range of others.

The rec center director at that time advocated a traditional carrot and stick program model: bad kids got kicked out, good kids (i.e., obedient, respectful, polite kids) got small rewards. The 30 kids we started with were "bad kids," "involved in the streets." Expulsion and the possibility of readmission were expected to somehow spark a character and behavioral change. There was no consideration of the effects of these expulsions on the lives of the youth or the neighborhood. Initially, there was great pressure, based on the expectations of City officials (and college student volunteers), to design programmatic interventions for the youth. This pressure was based on assumptions that as individuals the youth had not developed the necessary values of empathy and hard work nor faith in the uplifting potential of education. Based on his own experiences growing up in the neighborhood, the Streetworker with whom we worked resisted this approach, arguing for a space where the participants would simply be welcome and safe for three hours a week.

ISPN's model of intervention and change is described in Kennedy's book, *Don't Shoot* (2011): a combination of relationship building with gang members, strengthening the moral voice of the communities in which they live and of which they are a part, helping those most vulnerable and dangerous gain access to alternative resources and support, and doing work of racial reconciliation. Equally important, the relationships are sustained over time and through adversity. Consistent with Kennedy's findings, we agreed that the fundamental goal was to let the youth know they were welcome and valuable members of a meaningful community. "The core of the [gang] problem, the key to the way out," Kennedy writes, "lies in community, in communities" (p. 15).

The method we developed is based on the goals of (re-)integrating the youth into their communities and providing them with a context that can help them to become more resilient (Athens, 2003; Baizerman, 2007; Brooks & Goldstein, 2003; Kennedy, 2009; Neill, 1960; Norberg-Hodge, 2009; Roholt, Baizerman, Rana, & Korum, 2013; Ross, 2006, 2012; Thrasher, 1927/2002; Van Manen, 1990). Brooks and Goldstein list "a relatively small set of global factors associated with resilience. These include connections to competent, caring adults in the family and community, cognitive and self-regulation skills, positive views of self, and motivation to be effective in the environment" (p. xv). We start with the assumption that the youth are pursuing what they believe is most meaningful – what makes the most sense to them in their lived experience – and that conversations about meaning cannot take place until the youth are convinced that you understand and respect this. We use relationship building and conversation to surface, talk about, understand, and reimagine meaning structures. This opens the way to discussions about dreams, places people feel stuck, and alternatives they might pursue. Quite consistently, the middle-term result is a continuing discussion of "social ethics" – considerations of current events related to violence, race, and class, such as the shootings of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, arguments about the right thing to do in complex social situations where "respect" is being negotiated, and discussions about the relative dangers of using violence or nonviolence in addressing conflicts. The youth become less involved in violence when they begin to see it as an impediment, rather than a path, to what is meaningful in their lives. Getting to these conversations requires trust, and this means "keeping contact" with the youth and practicing constant hospitality and affirmation. This is complicated because a significant source of meaning in the life experiences of the youth is being expelled and excluded from both intimate and public social spaces.

The ongoing violence experienced by many of the Rec Night youth also has made us think deeply about what it means to create a "safe space" for people living with recurrent violence, and for volunteers who may have no frame of reference for understanding street violence. As the city's Chief of Police, Dean Esserman (notes of one of the authors, January 8, 2008), said at a board meeting of the ISPN, "all of the gang-involved youth have symptoms of Traumatic Stress Disorder – there's just no 'Post.'" Reflecting on this, we referred to the work of Shay (1994), a physician who helped define PTSD and shape its treatment, and who writes that the experience of violence is much more likely to lead to chronic symptoms when it is also violates a "belief about what is

right," a risk compounded when leaders fail to uphold that belief or insist on its violation. Many of the Rec Night youth experience violence because of the adults in their lives, and many of them feel that the police have declared war on them. Shay writes about treating PTSD through the "communalization of grief," a process which begins with telling the stories of one's experiences to "trusted others who can be expected to listen with compassion" (p. 55). Our understanding of listening with compassion is also informed by the work of Morton (1985), who writes,

> We empower one another by hearing the other to speech. We empower the disinherited, the outsider, as we are able to hear them name in their own way their own oppression and suffering… Hearing in this sense can break through political and social structures and image a new system. A great ear at the heart of the universe – at the heart of our common life – hearing human beings to speech – to our own speech. (p. 128)

The concepts of the "communalization of grief" and "hearing into speech" became part of the foundation for our theory of safe space – a space in which one can expect to find trusted others who will listen and respond with compassion. Rec Night is built on practicing and teaching people – youth and volunteers – to find and share their voices and listen to one another with compassion. As we reflected on the violence that affected the youth, their extended social networks, and the larger neighborhood, and engaged more deeply with the philosophy of nonviolence as an alternative way of being, we arrived at three very basic ideas about democracy, service, and social transformation:

- Democracy is an alternative to violence (force) in resolving conflicts (Chernus, 2004; Lynd, 1995; Schell, 2003). A commitment to civic engagement and community building is a commitment to practicing nonviolence in interpersonal and social relationships. Strengthening civil society is necessary if youth are going to survive and flourish (Kennedy, 2011). Practicing democracy requires listening and acting with compassion.

- Community service can be understood as what Mohandas Gandhi called a "constructive program" – the practice of using personal power to respond to suffering, acts that are also opportunities to come into direct relationship with the persons most harmed and learn from this experience the meaning of what is taking place. The constructive program, Gandhi argues, is one leg of a three-legged stool and is an opportunity for developing personal integrity and articulating a "political program." Meaning making

is experienced as a valuable and transformative potential within constructive programs, and points simultaneously toward personal and social transformation (Gandhi, 1951/1961; Iyer, 1983).

- The larger goal of nonviolent social change is some version of what philosopher Royce (1916) called the "great community" and King (King Center, 2015) called the "beloved community" – a network of social relationships characterized as inclusive and committed to principles of equality, inclusion, and pluralism, and to resolving conflict without resorting to force. This is not a community without conflict, but a community that is resilient in the face of conflict.

PC/Smith Hill Annex

Building on our experience with safe space at Rec Night, we began imagining what a "free space" (Evans & Boyte, 1986) or a "third space" (Oldenburg, 1999) might look like as a method of community engagement. We thought about the real and imagined barriers separating campus and community, and we revisited the dynamics of institutions such as the Catholic Worker (Troester, 1993), the early settlement houses, and the Highlander Folk Education Center (Longo, 2012), with their emphases on hospitality, popular education, and citizenship. We were inspired by the work of many others that emphasized conversation, dialogue, and constructive engagement with conflict as a basic method of building community and increasing the civic agency of ordinary people.

The result of our reflections was the PC/Smith Hill Annex, a 1,000 square foot storefront in the neighborhood, leased by the college from the Smith Hill Community Development Corporation. The space is made available for free to people from the community or campus planning any activity with the potential to bring campus and neighborhood people together for conversation and interaction. In 2011, we "squatted" in the space, kick-started by our third experiment, a new course with students from campus and community titled "The City and…", which we will turn to shortly.

Over three-plus years, 49 groups and organizations have shared the space, and many of them are now regulars, drawing in their own participants, adding to the multivocal, grassroots richness of the space. Examples include: Project 401, a hip-hop co-op committed to nonviolence which practices in the space and uses it for workshops for campus and community members; an informal weekly group of video gamers from the community that has started a gaming club

and is beginning to host tournaments; the National Association for Mental Illness, invited by a faculty member whose family has been impacted by mental illness, which runs a recurring 12-week workshop for family, friends, and caregivers; an informal economic development group that meets periodically and has hosted workshops on financial literacy, access to community lending, and social return on investment; English for Action which teaches English and prepares people for the citizenship exam while also teaching skills of public advocacy; the Milenio Latino Institute, organized by a local entrepreneur committed to putting Latino businesses on the radar of state economic development planners, which offers a recurring 12-week program for new, local entrepreneurs; community arts organizations that run summer and afterschool programs; alumni of a local housing project who meet as an association, periodically volunteer at Rec Night, and take part in the "It's On Us" movement that is responding to police and street violence; and a College faculty member, invested in the lives of Black teenage women, who began coming to Rec Night and now offers yoga classes for girls with goals of personal and political empowerment. All of these are spaces and opportunities for shared learning and reflection. While many of the activities look like "traditional" service, intended to address specific problems, they are also grass roots "constructive programs" run by local community members and college students committed to creating spaces for conversation across cultural boundaries and bringing people who otherwise would not interact into regular proximity with each other.

Each of the Annex-based initiatives identified above began with informal conversations about an idea someone had and then received support from others to put their idea into practice. So the space supports individuals initiating something and people who want to participate, and it introduces people to one another across these interests through occasional meals, celebrations, weekly updates, and electronic media. More than anything else, participants remark on the power of being given a key to the space, interpreting it as a metaphor of inclusion and trust.

What strikes us most about the Annex is the overall diversity of interests and ideas it supports, the unexpected ways that these interests disrupt and cross campus and neighborhood boundaries, and the creativity that emerges as people come into contact with one another across these interests. As with Rec Night, the key elements of the Annex are relationship, hospitality, and listening with compassion. The programs encourage creativity, address suffering, offer opportunities for learning, and support the development of meaningful livelihoods. More than supporting discrete activities, the larger goal of the

Annex is connecting these pieces into a self-reinforcing system that suggests what a revitalized community might look like.

The two years of organizing work on campus and in the community to gain support for the Annex also taught us something about the link between shared reflection and institutional change. The main topic of meetings with the executive administration of the College was whether or not supporting a project built on physical and metaphoric space, initiatives that fostered conversation, and an even more abstract idea of community was an authentic way for the campus to engage with the community. The institutional desire was to help in traditional ways. Over time, however, the College has begun substituting a language of neighbor and relationship in place of a language of fixing and helping, and has built the direct costs of the Annex into the College's budget. Speaking at a 2011 Annex event (notes of one of the authors, November 13, 2011), PC President Brian Shanley said:

> …in addition to being in a city, we're in a neighborhood and this is our neighborhood. …This is our local neighborhood and [the Annex] represents our anchoring in this neighborhood …and it's long term. We're not here for a little while, we're here hopefully for a long time.

The City and…

Working with College Unbound (n.d.) and the network growing out of our work with Rec Night, we helped design a course to be held at the Annex that would engage a different theme about the city each time it was taught. More importantly, the course would be composed of roughly two-fifths PC students, two-fifths College Unbound students, and one-fifth local community members (most often high school students). College Unbound is an alternative, experientially-based college for working adults. Several of its students work for ISPN as Streetworkers and have supported Rec Night over the years. The majority of College Unbound students are Black and Latino; they mostly grew up in Providence, often "on the street," and nearly all are first-generation college students; and College Unbound's educational philosophy is one of liberatory pedagogy (Freire, 1970/1994). In contrast, Providence College (n.d.) is a traditional, religiously-affiliated, liberal arts college; its students tend to be White, mostly right out of high school, mostly Catholic, mostly from wealthier suburbs, and successful in conventional schools; and its educational philosophy is one of "academic excellence in pursuit of the truth…"

The versions of the course thus far – the City and Its Youth, the City and Its Storytellers, the City and Its Generations – all have focused on storytelling,

cultural diversity, learning about the city, and the relationships between the personal and the political. Typically, teams of heterogeneous students conduct story-gathering research relevant to the theme, develop it as a multimedia project, and share their research with the class, other campus members, and residents of the neighborhood and city. The projects are intended to provoke reflection more than to teach principles of community-based research. Students learn to gather the stories of others by speaking and listening to one another. The students have deep and personal discussions of political matters such as race, class, gender, education, inequality, and freedom and incarceration as well as personal matters such as food, basketball, music, family, core values, and life goals. They practice listening with compassion to one another. The depth of conversation is often humbling and moving and sometimes transformational. It is also energizing, and motivates students to articulate their own truths and practice acting on those truths. The course also acts as a "hub" for connecting other initiatives at the Annex, regularly inviting in guests, and using the Annex network as a resource for gathering and sharing stories.

Common Grounds Café

The fourth expression of our ongoing experiment was Common Grounds Café, a coffee and sandwich shop next door to the Annex, which one of us helped manage in her role as a graduate assistant. The concept for the café grew out of conversations among participants in an economic development group meeting regularly at the Annex for two years. Integrating the interests of the Smith Hill Community Development Corporation (which owned the café space), the college's Global Studies Department and School of Business, the interests of neighborhood residents, and ongoing conversations about the neighborhood's economy, Common Grounds opened in 2013 with a combined mission of selling fair trade and local products while serving as an informal gathering space for community and campus. It required considerably more capital investment than Rec Night, the Annex, or The City and..,, and structured space primarily for conversation. In addition to attracting a wider and more loosely linked audience than Rec Night or the Annex, it was intended to increase the "connectivity" of interaction: Several of the Café staff were Rec Night participants and participated in Annex activities, the Café catered many Annex events, and Annex users were regular customers. The setup was organized and the staff trained to encourage conversation.

The financial pressures of building out and operating the café were significant, and we expected it to take two years for it to become self-supporting.

Unfortunately, a little more than one year after the café opened, the Smith Hill Community Development Corporation experienced a series of personnel and financial crises, including the death of its executive director, frozen funding streams from two public sources, and the foreclosure of the 13-apartment, 6-storefront development that housed both the café and Annex. The café was closed in May 2015, even as the number of people buying its products and participating in its community events was increasing and it was beginning to fulfill its mission.

Where Rec Night and the Annex tend to draw in groups of people who share some initial interests, the organizing tool at the café was food and drink. It was also a place where local community and campus knew they could find a good conversation about current events. The shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson (Teaching Ferguson, 2015), for example, was a constant topic of conversation. Given the sharp racial division in public response to the shooting, having a space for conversation across racial, economic, and geographic lines was important. It was also a space to talk about similar experiences that had taken place in Providence, about current street violence in the city and neighborhood, and about broader issues of racism, mass incarceration, and *The New Jim Crow* (Alexander, 2012). Rec Night participants could drop in or were on the staff, and students from "The City and…" would come before class as well as local residents, students, faculty, and staff of the College to share an experience or ask a question. Oldenberg (1999) describes "third places" as settings where perspectives and values and judgments can be floated and tested in a dynamic, fluid social environment without the safety of an intimate private space, and without the more formal positions, interests, and commitments of public spaces. While much of the conversation at the Common Grounds Café was also about weather, baseball, children, and school, it did serve as a very diverse "third space" for community and campus.

Analysis

Our experiment may be useful in and of itself, suggesting some specific ways of making space for campus-community conversation and reflection. It is perhaps more useful, however, in pointing to the potential of using shared space and reflection to move people toward what Meens (2014) calls the "democratic threshold" (p. 49) of civic engagement, and to the value of thinking more concretely about what is meant by "community" in service-learning.

The Democratic Threshold of Civic Engagement

Our experiences in making space for campus-community reflection suggest that developing an identity

as a citizen is first an act of imagination, a way of thinking about one's self in relationship to other people and to the larger world. Meens (2014) describes two broad traditions of democracy influential in service-learning:

> participatory democracy is concerned with structural inequalities, and seeks to fundamentally transform these through democratization of social institutions generally. The participatory citizen is an active (even activist) citizen that shapes public life and policy through direct engagement. Deliberative democracy, by contrast, is characterized by a focus on discursive reasoning about common problems that aims at generating outcomes acceptable to all. (p. 49)

Meens suggests that these different conceptualizations of democracy align with the contrasting models of service-learning: deliberative democracy aligns with the traditional service-learning model and participatory democracy aligns with the critical service-learning model. Rather than idealizing one form of democratic or service-learning practice over the other, he suggests service-learning practitioners recognize that these are often "'distributed and sequenced' within a larger normative framework" (p. 49), and argues that service-learning should draw on both traditions to enable:

> principled judgment as to what in the status quo ought to be preserved and what must be transformed if democracy and social justice goals are to be realized, rather than a simple commitment to either "public work" or "social transformation." (p. 49)

Each of the projects we have described moves fluidly between participatory and deliberative understandings of the role of citizens. They do so because the conversations begin with the lived experiences and stories of participants and then gravitate toward what they think will be the most effective strategy for a given situation at a given moment in time. Participants initially want to seek consensus or define issues as problems with technical solutions rather than embark on messy discussions of questions having to do with meaning that can never be fully resolved (Van Manen, 1990). The participants become more public and political as they learn to work with multiple perspectives and interpretations of these questions that do not require that they give up their own values or interests. This is, we think, what Meens calls the "democratic threshold": the moment when a person has a self-conscious awareness of being part of a larger community of diverse interests, and cares that their words and actions have consequences not only for themselves but also for the other members of the community. The more diverse the life experiences in the conversation, the more likely participants will cross this threshold.

The Meaning of Community in Service-Learning

Our experiment also points to problems in the concept of community implicit in understandings of higher education service-learning. The word community is typically used as a shorthand for nonprofit organizations, schools, and government agencies. The nearly exclusive reliance on partnerships with these institutions is evidence, we think, of a "deep structure" in higher education-based service-learning, a consistent system of elements, interconnections, and purposes that operates "in such a way that [it] produce[s its] own pattern of behavior over time" (Meadows, 2008, pp. 11-14).

Critiques of these institutions are longstanding, deep, and far-reaching (Addams 1899, 1902, 1910; Freire, 1970/1994; Hall, 1992; Illich, 1968/1990; McKnight, 1989; Wagner, 2000). Collectively, they argue that nonprofit organizations tend to be driven by need- and deficit-based logic models. They are vulnerable to funding challenges as the number of nonprofit organizations grows faster than resources, and as they become increasingly dependent on private rather than government sources (Urban Institute, 2014; Wagner). More significantly, contemporary nonprofit organizations are not so much classic "voluntary associations" as private corporations for delivering government-funded programs and services. They are restricted from engaging in political activities (IRS, 2015), a limit put in place expressly to limit their public impact (Hall, 1992). The growing focus on technical expertise, measurable outcomes, and the degree to which funders (over)determine what will count as outcomes (Fisher, 1983; Sakamoto & Hustedde, 2009; Samimi, 2010) further reduce the ability of nonprofit organizations to represent the interests of community members and address the root causes of the problems that give the organizations their purpose. We are not opposed in any way to working with these community institutions, in practice find them valuable partners, and have sympathy for the pressures they face. We approach them as institutions in communities, however, and do not assume that they are "the community," that their interests are the same as those of the people and places they serve, or that they are always well-suited to helping students cross the "democratic threshold."

We think of community as a place-based system of persons and relationships (Agnew & Duncan, 1989; Brennan & Brown, 2008). We engage community members directly – not as an alternative to working with nonprofit institutions, but in addition to working with them. In contrast to community-based nonprofits that work to "empower constituents" by inviting

participation in the work of the organization (Hardina, 2008), our goal is to develop reflective and working relationships with individuals and groups of community members alongside the community institutions with which we and they work. This allows us to understand the "self-interests" at work in more complex and productive ways, makes it easier to identify and support community assets, and makes it easier for campus and community members to engage in critical conversations about structural issues such as racism, inequality, and education.

We also understand community as a systems effect that has tangible value in people's lives (Berry, 1983), and argue that building resilient communities is a useful long-term vision for service-learning and civic engagement, and an explicit counter to the more destructive consequences of neoliberal values and policies. Community happens when the key subsystems of place-based social processes are working in concert: passing formal and local knowledge on to the young, supporting members in their suffering and grieving, helping members celebrate and create, and providing access to a meaningful livelihood (Berry). "Community" is what happens when the feedback loops among these processes shorten, are strengthened, and begin to reinforce one another as what systems theorists call a "virtuous circle." People then associate their experience of these systems effects with their articulation of place and social identity (Brennan & Brown, 2008).

We recognize that any given community is always in tension with internal and external pressures. What damages community is anything that breaks down its subsystems and feedback loops, or changes "virtuous" circles into "vicious" circles. The most notable breakdown of the last forty years, consonant with the emergence of neoliberal culture, has been the rapid weakening of the economic dimensions of community life in the face of a globalizing economy and rapidly increasing inequality (Bradshaw, 2008; Goodsell, Brown, Stovall, & Simpson, 2008). As with the Rec Night youth, resilience is a "measure of a system's ability to survive and persist in a variable environment" (Meadows, 2008, p. 76), and a community's resilience (Brennan & Brown, 2008; Zautra, Hall, & Murray, 2009) is a measure of its ability to "bounce back and fully recover from challenge" and "continue forward in the face of adversity" (Zautra et al., p. 132). When damage to a system or a community passes a certain threshold, the system collapses (Meadows, 2008). The pressures on the community systems of inner-city neighborhoods, such as the one with which the College works, perpetually push them to the brink of collapse.

The highest forms of resilience come from "self-organizing" systems that "can *learn, create, design and evolve* ever more complex restorative structures" (Meadows, 2008, p. 76; emphasis in original). Service-learning can work with community and campus members, individuals and institutions, to increase individual and community resilience. The spaces we describe are largely "self-organizing," and designed to encourage learning and creativity as pathways to personal and community resilience.

Final Thoughts

The evidence of a shared, stronger community that we look for over time includes greater mutual knowledge of one another and softening of the boundaries between campus and community. We expect people from campus and community will know more of their neighbors, across more physical and cultural boundaries, and will know and value the history of their shared place (Kimball & Thomas, 2012). We expect neighborhood youth will be involved in reduced violence, show greater resilience, and be more successful in terms that they define for themselves. We expect that adult neighborhood residents and campus members will stop seeing minority youth as threats and problems (Brady & Dolan, 2009; Ross, 2006). We expect residents to find more reasons to stay in and invest in the neighborhood rather than dream of moving to first-ring suburbs with better schools, better housing, and reduced social stress. Long term, we hope to see a greater percentage of the money flowing through the neighborhood "stick" before being spent at big box stores and paid to absentee landlords. And we expect that people will turn out for an increasing number of events that celebrate interests shared by campus and community. Our argument is that all of these measurable goals – markers of the systems effect we call community (Zautra et al., 2009) – begin with conversation and reflection.

The approach we advocate locates the "problem" outside of persons, the neighborhood, and the College. We do not solve youth violence by teaching kids how to mediate conflicts; we solve youth violence by talking with youth who are violent, learning with them how to change conditions so that the choice of violence seems less reasonable and less meaningful, and working to put this into action. Racism and inequality are not solved in the abstract; we begin by having people share their stories in safe spaces where they can expect to be heard and responded to with compassion, and we determine how to use this to direct future action. We do not learn "diversity" as an ideological construct; we learn it as a lived experience of relationship building in contexts that require us to negotiate historic and present-day conflicts. We do not convince people to spend more on fair trade coffee because it is the

"right" thing to do; we create social value, a place where people can meet and interact with their friends and neighbors, and extend their social networks, which adds value to buying coffee.

The college students involved in Rec Night, the Annex, and Common Grounds Café report that the hardest thing for them in this constellation of experiences is letting go of the idea that their job is to "fix things." They think that, as college students, they are leaders and role models to Rec Night youth. They learn that the youth most often do not see them in this light, and instead see them as privileged, not very street smart, and as the products of their privilege. The youth are not harsh about this, but tell the college students, "with the same resources you have, I could do more of what I wanted, too."

The college students and community participants are curious about one another in all of the spaces. Almost inevitably, if they are going to keep the conversation going, the focus shifts to their joint consideration of inequality. The college students come to the Annex as participants, and learn that everyone – including themselves – has a story, and this is the organizing principle of "The City and….". They learn that social enterprises and constructive programs, while useful and interesting, do not by themselves change structural inequalities – and sometimes objectify the people they want to help. They learn, as well, that the personal growth they experience by participating in difficult conversations and working in complex, diverse environments can increase their desire and willingness to participate in communal and public life.

We recognize that faculty, students, and community members enter into service-learning efforts for a range of reasons. Similarly, people think about, value, and do service for a range of personal and social motivations. It remains our sense, however, that when the focus is on the integrity of relationships, all forms of service can "lead ultimately toward the transformation of an individual within a community and toward the transformation of the communities themselves" (Morton, 1995, p. 29).

Each of the projects we describe is vulnerable in a multitude of ways; each spreads "risk" and control across a broad base of interdependent relationships, making them difficult to manage and predict. We do not know the outcomes ahead of time, and most of our impacts are too indirect to measure accurately. We know, too, that measuring them accurately would change the social dynamic of the process. We remain under-theorized and need to learn to tell our stories more clearly and accurately. And yet we are inspired by our experiences of campus and community members meeting as equals in a context of ongoing reflection directed toward personal growth, community building, and civic engagement.

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