RESEARCH TO INFLUENCE CHANGE

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In the early 1990s, as an assistant professor at Northeastern University in Boston, I learned about service learning through experimenting with practice. I started writing about service learning as a way to better understand what I was doing. My publications at the time were a mix of history scholarship (my academic training is as a historian) and pieces on service learning, experiential education, and John Dewey. I wrote a piece titled "Becoming a Reflective Historian Through Community Service-Learning" (Saltmarsh, 1996a). I researched Dewey for the piece "Education for Critical Citizenship: John Dewey's Contribution to the Pedagogy of Service Learning" (Saltmarsh, 1996b). These early contributions laid a firm foundation for my research agenda focused on the public purposes of higher education.

My experience with practice was intensified when I taught a required methods course in the history department and used the course to implement service learning. This experiment with redesigning curriculum to incorporate service learning led to my first foray into the scholarship of teaching and learning. I carefully documented and assessed the course, learned a great deal about my pedagogical practice, interrogated that practice through theoretical lenses, and disseminated the findings. An essay about the course appeared as a chapter, "Emerson's Prophesy," in the book *Connecting Past and Present: Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in History*, part of the 21-volume series on service learning in the disciplines edited by Edward Zlotkowski (Saltmarsh, 2000). My research on service learning emerged from practice.

At the same time that I was studying my service learning practice and researching the intellectual roots of service learning, I was also facing the kind of ethical dilemmas that follow from the logic behind community-engaged

teaching and learning. What did it mean for an individual faculty member to build deep partnerships with those in the community and then complete the project at the end of the term? Were the benefits of student learning the result of taking advantage of (i.e., exploiting) marginalized communities? Was this simply a matter of pedagogy and curriculum, or were there other kinds of campus commitments that needed to be considered? As I shared in an interview with Harry Boyte,

> the more I got involved in taking course work into the community, the more I understood that service-learning compelled institutional change. From the inside, we as faculty see the question as about us as individuals, teaching. Communities see [our arrival] as about the institution. Stepping out into the community can't simply be done individually. It requires a larger institutional response. (Boyte, 2004, p. 14)

My teaching practice was leading to new lines of inquiry and beyond a focus on service learning.

After being offered tenure in history at Northeastern University, I accepted an invitation from Rick Battistoni and Keith Morton to spend my sabbatical year at Providence College. The college had, in the prior year, started the Feinstein Institute for Public Service and instituted a new undergraduate major and minor in public and community service studies. My year at the Feinstein Institute provided an extraordinary opportunity to both deepen practice and to deepen research in the company of insightful, critically reflective colleagues. While there I wrote a piece on "Ethics, Reflection, Purpose, and Compassion: Community Service Learning" (Saltmarsh, 1997); an article on "Exploring the Meaning of University/Community Partnerships" (Saltmarsh, 1998); and based on a course cotaught with Morton, we wrote "Addams, Day, and Dewey: The Emergence of Community Service in American Culture" (Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997). These were philosophical, theoretical, and historical explorations driven by questions about reciprocity, justice, and democratic practices in community engagement.

If the previous few years had been immersion in practice, while that immersion continued, my time with colleagues at the Feinstein Institute was an immersion in collaborative thought, research, and writing within an environment that catalyzed reflection and inquiry. My research agenda was shaped by practice and driven by areas in the field needing deeper exploration—ethical considerations, partnerships, and the origins and influences on our practice. At the same time, my research home was shifting away from disciplinary conferences in history to higher education conferences on

experiential education and service learning. I published less in disciplinary journals and thought more about the reach and impact of my research. I could do this in part because this was where the questions were taking me, but also because I had received tenure at Northeastern University. I could use tenure to try to create change aimed at the democratic purposes of higher education and for public scholarship.

From the University to Higher Education

I had been back at Northeastern University for nine months when I requested and was allowed to take a two-year leave to work at the national office of Campus Compact. I was recruited to direct the Integrating Service With Academic Study project. With my position at Campus Compact, we were having an impact on higher education nationally, and the two-year leave ended up becoming an almost eight-year stint. I ultimately gave up a tenured position and was provided an opportunity to think carefully about research and impact with a new set of colleagues. Stepping outside of a campus context was a major shift for me. I became what Harry Boyte termed a *scholar in residence* at Campus Compact. In the interview I did with him, I explained,

> The transition from academia helped me to see academic culture in ways that I hadn't seen so clearly before. I never quite appreciated the degree to which academics live in a world of their own. I never quite appreciated how we are socialized to be accountable only to ourselves. I was socialized to believe that my first loyalty was to my profession (a loyalty that was fairly undefined but meant something about my scholarship adhering to the standards of the craft) and after that there were no loyalties, not to institution, department, colleagues, or students. This deep socialization fostering the privatization of the faculty role led to inherent disengagement in social and political affairs. My work at [Campus Compact] has public accountability . . . I am much more conscious of an audience. I write not for a small group of academics but for as wide a group as possible. There is also a shift in the realm of impact, from my home institution and a few students and the neighborhood, to working with colleagues around the country to try to shape the future, to build a democracy. (Boyte, 2004, p. 15)

During my time at Campus Compact, my research focused more directly on institutional change. We hired Edward Zlotkowski as a senior scholar, and the two of us directed the scholarly agenda advanced by Campus Compact. Zlotkowski was also a humanities scholar, so our biases regarding methods tended toward stories and narrative rather than social science and

quantitative studies. We gravitated toward case studies, analyzing what we were seeing in the field. In choosing publication outlets, we aimed for practitioners and leaders and ways to reach a wide audience. We were intentional about what data and evidence matter to which constituencies, and we tailored our writing to reach targeted audiences—presidents, provosts, faculty, staff, and community partners.

With either Zlotkowski or Campus Compact's executive director, Liz Hollander, or both, we published, as examples, "The Engaged University" (Hollander & Saltmarsh, 2000); "Creating a Personal and Political Culture of Engagement in Higher Education" (Saltmarsh, 2001); "Indicators of Engagement" (Hollander, Zlotkowski, & Saltmarsh, 2001); and "Service Learning as a Fulcrum of Institutional Reform" (Zlotkowski & Saltmarsh, 2004). Based on an analysis of a service learning database of syllabi collected, I wrote "The Civic Promise of Service Learning" (Saltmarsh, 2005). This research was aimed at pushing the field to deeper engagement and institutional change. The methods were aligned with ways to make visible exemplary practice and provide accessible models to a range of stakeholders.

My research was focused on questions of institutional culture, policy, and practice. I wanted to explore what Eckel, Hill, and Green (1998) talked about as "the common set of beliefs and values that creates a shared interpretation and understanding of events and actions" (p. 3) related to civic engagement. This meant trying to understand "institution-wide patterns of perceiving, thinking, and feeling; shared understandings; collective assumptions; and common interpretive frameworks" (p. 3). The focus of my research was higher education organizations' artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions to understand better how to bring about change to advance civic engagement as a way of colleges and universities better fulfilling their democratic purpose.

By the time I left Campus Compact in 2005, I had learned a great deal about higher education, institutional change, and civic engagement from my work with colleagues across the country and from serving as a consultant on campuses across the United States. Certain things had crystalized in a way that they previously had not. It was now much clearer that at the core of my thinking about higher education is the belief, drawing on the educational philosopher John Dewey, that democracy is a learned activity, that education is essential to a healthy and functioning democracy, and that education should allow students to learn democracy by practicing it through their education. This, of course, would mean that higher education, as it is traditionally practiced, would have to change dramatically and be much more publicly engaged and connected to local communities.

Power, Politics, and Positionality in the University

In 2005, I was hired as the director of the New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE) at the University of Massachusetts–Boston. My position was as half-time director and half-time faculty member in the higher education doctoral program, where I had an appointment as a tenured full professor in the Department of Leadership in Education. I was now in a position where I could study change in higher education, continue to work to advance civic engagement in higher education, and work to effect change both on my own campus and externally. My research agenda was driven by problems and changes in civic engagement and in higher education, and in some ways shaped by my tenured status, in the sense that I was not compelled to produce in ways that junior faculty would be. I could continue to focus on problems, audiences, approaches, impacts, and scholarly artifacts—and I could decide how best to have an influence.

In 2008, through NERCHE, I collaborated with Matthew Hartley, a colleague at the University of Pennsylvania, and colleagues at the Kettering Foundation to pull together a meeting at the Kettering Foundation. The problem we were trying to understand was "the sense of drift and stalled momentum in civic engagement work" (Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009, p. 1), and our inquiry was guided by some key questions, including the following:

- Are current civic engagement efforts transforming higher education or have they been adopted in ways that do not fundamentally challenge the dominant cultures of higher education institutions and American society?
- How can the movement best navigate the inherent tension between challenging the status quo and securing legitimacy through accommodation?
- How can colleges and universities cultivate caring and creative democratic citizens and advance democracy in schools, universities, communities, and society?
- What sort of institutional commitments are needed to foster civic engagement among students and among academics in order to advance participatory democracy on campus, in the community, and the wider society? (Saltmarsh et al., 2009, p. 12)

One outcome of the meeting at the Kettering Foundation was a paper capturing the wisdom of attendees—our data were the discussion and insights of the participants in conversation with the literature and our own knowledge and experiences (Saltmarsh et al., 2009).

Our goal was to deliberately try to influence the field in ways that provided a more secure foundation and grounding for practice and identify the kinds of changes needed on campuses. We thought carefully about influence—what would be the best way to have the greatest impact on the field? We did not want the piece to be shaped by any organization's agenda, so we chose not to do it as a Kettering Foundation publication. We wanted a broad audience, both inside academia and outside, so we did not see great value in an academic journal article. We arrived at doing an electronic publication that would be open access. We valued peer review, so we sent drafts to participants at the Kettering Foundation meeting and experts in the field who were not in attendance.

The *Democratic Engagement White Paper* (Saltmarsh et al., 2009) accomplished two objectives. First, it made the distinction "between civic engagement as it is widely manifested in higher education" and what we called "democratic engagement" (p. 7). Engagement in a "democratic-centered framework" had "an explicit and intentional democratic dimension framed as inclusive, collaborative, and problem-oriented work in which academics share knowledge-generating tasks with the public and involve community partners as participants in public problem-solving" (p. 9). Second, it linked engagement practices to significant cultural and organizational change on campus. Democratic engagement could not happen in higher education institutions as they were; it required fundamental and transformative change.

In a short time, we were getting feedback from across the country and around the globe, from within higher education and from outside the sector. The paper resonated deeply with a wide audience. The editor of a British education journal read the paper and asked if we would do a piece in the journal. In 2010, we published "Is the Civic Engagement Movement Changing Higher Education?" (Hartley & Saltmarsh, 2010). George Mehaffy, vice president at the American Association of State College and Universities, told us that he really appreciated the paper, but that he could not use it because it did not tell his members what to do—it was not practical enough. That fueled our thinking about an edited volume in which we asked participants from the Kettering Foundation meeting to write about concrete democratic engagement practices on their campuses, and we could provide a set of recommendations: *To Serve a Larger Purpose: Engagement for Democracy and the Transformation of Higher Education* (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011).

I think about our approach here relative to the culture of higher education, my positionality within it, and the question of the impact of research. Of all the products that came out of our research, the one most traditionally valued through promotion and tenure review would have been the peer-reviewed journal article. The edited book would also have been valued, but

less so. The virtual publication of the white paper would have had little, if any, value—it would not have been considered peer reviewed; it did not have a publisher; and it certainly did not have a traditional measure of impact, like a journal's impact factor. Yet it has proven to be the most widely read piece that I have produced and had a far greater impact on the field—on practice, on theory, on institutional change—than the journal article or the book that followed.

The *Democratic Engagement White Paper*, and the responses and feedback to it, catalyzed new lines of inquiry and further research. The Canadian scholar Jennifer Simpson uses the third chapter of her 2014 book, *Longing for Justice: Higher Education and Democracy's Agenda*, to offer a critique of our white paper (and the civic engagement movement more broadly) in the following ways: (a) it fails to identify that all scholarship has a political agenda; (b) it does not articulate explicit democratic values; (c) it has not addressed the role of power and "obscures the workings of privilege and power" (Simpson, 2014, p. 95); (d) it does not tie norms of democratic culture to concrete practices of injustice at the individual and institutional level ("refusal to name injustice," Simpson, 2014, p. 95); and (e) the suggestion that democratic norms have been beneficent to all in equitable ways represents a dismissal of history and radical denial of current practices ("uncritically accepting democratic norms," Simpson, 2014, p. 95). Simpson's critique, which she shared with me in conversations in the years before her book was published, along with discussions from a wide group of colleagues, was completely fair, accurate, and critically insightful—and pushed my thinking in new ways. Democratic engagement would need to be more explicit about questions of power, privilege, politics, positionality, identity, and implication.

I was thinking about democratic engagement in light of insights and feedback colleagues were providing when I connected with scholars through Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life, a consortium launched in 1999 by the White House Millennium Council. Together with Susan Sturm, a professor at Columbia School of Law, as well as Timothy Eatman, the research director from Imagining America, and Adam Bush at Imagining America, we wrote "Full Participation: Building the Architecture for Diversity and Public Engagement in Higher Education" (Sturm, Eatman, Saltmarsh, & Bush, 2011). We followed the playbook from the *Democratic Engagement White Paper* and published a virtual paper that was open access. In "Full Participation" we drew on a law review article written by Sturm called "The Architecture of Inclusion" (2006). This allowed us to crack open ways of thinking about institutional culture beyond the confines of the ways diversity was playing out on college campuses. Sturm had been pushed to expand her thinking as a legal scholar in the context of the attacks on affirmative action

in higher education. Full participation is about integrating the priorities of diversity and inclusion, public engagement, and the success of underserved students—or, said somewhat differently, it is about integrating collaborative ways of generating knowledge, active and collaborative teaching and learning, and student success.

We found that a growing body of research has demonstrated that women and faculty of color are more likely to engage in both interdisciplinary and community-service-related behaviors, including community-engaged and inclusive pedagogical practice in teaching and learning and building research agendas related to public problem-solving in local communities. Research indicates that faculty roles and rewards—criteria for research, scholarship, and creative activity—either (a) reward community engagement as service (counting little in promotion and tenure) or (b) do not specifically reward community engagement as either teaching, research and creative activity, or service. We also found that research indicates that the academic success of systematically and traditionally underserved students is enhanced by increased opportunities to participate in high-impact teaching and learning practices—practices that involve greater engagement in learning. One of these practices is community-based teaching and learning (often referred to as *service learning* or *community engagement* tied to the curriculum). Research also suggested that the academic success of underserved students is enhanced by increased opportunities to identify with faculty and staff who represent ethnic, racial, gender, and cultural diversity.

One aspect of the Full Participation study was that the literature revealed the emergence of what we called in the paper "next generation academic professionals" (Sturm et al., 2011, p. 11). The Full Participation study and the *Democratic Engagement White Paper* fed into a loosely formed research collective we then called the Next Generation Engagement Project that involved scholars from around the country ranging from graduate students to senior academics, exploring a problem that was described in this way:

> While large-scale change has been slow to emerge, there are indications that the next generation of students and scholars has already committed itself to balancing the cosmopolitan with the local in a way that fosters a more socially responsive stance within higher education. (Next Generation Engagement Project, 2018)

The next-generation inquiry culminated in a book (Post, Longo, Ward, & Saltmarsh, 2016). The Next Generation Engagement Project and the book brought together the democratic engagement, full participation, and culture change in higher education lines of inquiry into a focused research project.

My contributions to the project were as a member of the research collective and coeditor of the book. In addition Matthew Hartley and I contributed two chapters on the history of the civic engagement movement in relation to the next generation of engaged scholars. The second chapter of the book was a brief metahistory of the civic engagement movement in American higher education since the 1970s that examined key events and stages in the movement leading to the present moment (Hartley & Saltmarsh, 2016). With these two chapters, I drew on my academic roots as a historian, examining evidence and placing it in conversation with a historical narrative. This was also a historical study where both the evidence and the narrative were in conversation with the historians, since both Hartley and I were very much participants to the history we were writing about.

The democratic engagement, full participation, next generation, and historical inquiry into the movement has fed a new research agenda that I describe as retheorizing the public good in higher education (Rice, Saltmarsh, & Plater, 2015). The meaning of the public good purposes of higher education in an age of neoliberalism decimates commitments to the public. I developed this inquiry with a paper delivered as a keynote for the 2016 annual conference of the Western Association of Schools and College, the regional accrediting body for western states (Saltmarsh, 2016). I explored three versions of higher education's commitment to the public good, what I called thin, transformational, and thick. This research is still in progress, but it is aimed at probing the formulations of higher education's historic commitments to the public good and examining those formulations in the context of the neoliberal university. Using community-engaged scholarship, a particular kind of scholarly activity that has as its essential purpose public commitments and relationships, I want to examine those commitments and relationships in the context of a neoliberal logic as a way of retheorizing higher education's relationship to the public good.

The lens of community engagement as an epistemological orientation with implications for the ethics of knowledge-making allows for a framing of the public good that is imbued with ethical considerations and bringing explicit justice commitments into conceptions of the public good. Thus, this line of inquiry is tied to the concept of epistemic justice (and epistemic injustice) and its implications for the work of new scholars in higher education. Epistemic justice is a philosophical frame developed by the British philosopher Miranda Fricker. Its relevance for faculty work in higher education, in particular the practice of pedagogy and research, is in (a) focusing on an epistemological orientation (How do we know what we know? How is knowledge constructed? What is considered legitimate knowledge?), (b) treating epistemology as having not only an intellectual dimension but also

an ethical dimension, and (c) foregrounding identity and power in analysis of ethics in considering systems that silence and delegitimize knowers and ways of knowing (Fricker, 2007).

I want to use the philosophical framework of epistemic justice to explore the construction of pedagogical practices and faculty rewards as fundamentally a cultural artifact, which at its core is shaped by epistemic assumptions and values. The examination is conducted through the case of culturally relevant pedagogical practices and emerging forms of scholarship (inter- and transdisciplinary scholarship, digital scholarship, community-engaged scholarship), which, while exhibiting certain methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks, express a particular epistemological orientation. This orientation is then examined in the context of both the identity of new scholars and the historical traditions within the cultures of higher education as a way of understanding its relation to the dominant cultural norms. Using a lens of epistemic justice provides a way to examine the formulations of higher education's historic commitments to the public good and understand those formulations in the context of the neoliberal university.

Lessons Learned

As I reflect on this research narrative, I am also working on a new project that, in many ways, encapsulates the lessons I can draw from it. I am currently a part of a research team that includes 2 of my graduate students. The subject of our study is reward policies that create incentives for faculty to undertake community-engaged scholarship. It is a study that emerged out of practice: The university we are studying has revised its institutional faculty reward policies to include community engagement across the faculty roles (i.e., teaching, research, and service). Once this change had been adopted at the university level, each college and department was charged with revising their promotion and tenure policies to align with the institutional policies. Experience in the field and familiarity with the literature suggested that little was known about how departments frame incentives for community engagement out of different disciplinary orientations. We could examine 54 departments at this institution to see how revised policies were constructed. The significance of the study is that it could provide insight to support other departments, colleges, and campuses revising their guidelines.

One lesson that emerges is to do research that makes a difference in changing higher education. As you design research projects, be intentional about the purpose of the research, how you would like it to be used, and to

what end. This kind of intentionality can influence methodology, and it can influence the kinds of products that you create to disseminate your research. This also means being deliberative about the audiences that you want to reach and why. These choices are neither dogmatic nor dichotomous, but they are choices that you should be intentional about in order to achieve intended influence.

The second lesson is to design research projects that emerge from practice. As a community partner once reminded me, instead of evidence-based practice, it would be more valuable to have practice-based evidence. All of my community-engaged research emerged out of problems that I encountered through practice. They were not hypothetical or theoretical topics. My research on practice aligns with what Tony Chambers, in the foreword to the 2016 book *Engaged Research and Practice*, calls scholarship on or about engagement (Chambers, 2016). Scholarship on or about engagement involves the study of the processes and/or outcomes of collaboration, decision-making, research, and action within the relationship between scholars and communities. The focus of my research has been higher education organizations' artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions to understand better how to bring about change to advance civic engagement as a way for colleges and universities to fulfill their democratic purposes.

The third lesson that emerges is the importance of doing scholarship collaboratively. As my career progressed, I increasingly collaborated with other scholars on my research projects. My approach to research has not been collaborative in the sense of mutually beneficial relationships between those in the university and those outside the university. Rather, it has been collaborative in the sense of working with other scholars in transdisciplinary ways to understand community engagement within higher education. Such collaboration allowed for gaining varied perspectives, insights, and understandings from across disciplines. It offered the possibilities of deep learning with colleagues and students. Fundamentally, it led to better scholarship; scholarship on community engagement practice aimed at impacting transformational change in higher education.

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