SOCIOLOGY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD: A UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE MODEL FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

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REFLEXIVE STATEMENT

Each of the authors comes to the work detailed in the following article from a different direction but share an equal commitment to social change and social justice. Positive early experiences in low-income neighborhoods shaped each of our lives in ways that contribute to our interest in combining higher education with the rich community life of such areas. We are part of a core group of faculty and staff who have successfully created a unique integrated network of community-based learning initiatives with the Southeast Neighborhoods of Indianapolis and the University of Indianapolis.

INTRODUCTION

Sociologists occupy a strategic position at the beginning of the 21st century. Seemingly marginalized, the profession is, in fact, embedded in universities and communities throughout the country in greater numbers than ever. Although many work out of the limelight (thus reinforcing a sense of being marginal) sociologists everywhere are engaged with students and with residents in local communities, often bringing the two together in community-based learning initiatives.

The present paper deals with this emerging integration of the academy and local communities. The authors discuss the Community Learning/Community Building model, its implementation, and its broader implications for sociology, higher education, and local communities. The model embodies a sociologically guided community-based learning initiative that combines service learning with a community building approach to action.

Several recent trends in American society have converged to create an environment suitable for a significant shift in both higher education and community development. While a new environment exists, effective models of how best to restructure educational and community development approaches remain elusive. This paper explores the changing character and context of higher education and describes a new model of activist learning emerging out of relationships among faculty, students and local communities.

For several decades, universities have been seen as increasingly detached from important issues facing American society. Top ranking faculty were seldom in the classroom, concentrating instead on research and publishing. Universities shifted their priorities to reward such career paths, and filled classrooms with graduate student instructors with little life or academic experience (Boyer, 1994; Boyte and Kari, 1996). Some sociologists were leaders in challenging this situation, but mainstream sociology followed this general trend (Dolgon, 2002). In the 1990s, public reaction against the seemingly arrogant attitude of the top universities began to build, leading to demands for accountability and responsiveness to community needs. Increasing numbers of adult students returning to college put even more pressure on universities to relate more effectively to the world off campus.

Although the initial focus of discontent was state supported universities, the severity of the criticisms caused private institutions to review their practices as well. The most visible response, besides internal assessment and accountability procedures, was a national movement encouraging student involvement in local communities. Initially, this took the form of increased volunteerism, but has since grown into widespread curricular-based service learning and community-based learning programs. Campus Compact, the Invisible College, and the Community Campus Partnership for Health are examples of nationwide organizations that have developed to provide direction and support for these initiatives. Even with these supportive organizations, the move to engage education with local communities has been a struggle.

The growing literature on community-based learning focuses generally on two areas of concern. First is the literature that examines how to integrate service learning into the teaching of specific disciplines, including sociology (Ostrow, Hesser, and Enos, 1999). The second is a sociological critique of such approaches drawing on social change theory and research. This literature contrasts a "charity" approach to service learning with a social change model. Guthrie (2000) and Kahne and Westheimer (1999) present a broad critique of service learning while Dale (2000) and Dolgon (2002) provide a valuable discussion of change oriented community-based learning. What has been missing, however, is a model fully integrating higher education and community life.

Roughly concurrent with the above changes within higher education has been a continued deterioration of local communities, particularly those in inner city or older suburban areas. Federal programs of the 1960's and 1970's were written off as failures, while the 1980's saw a widespread withdrawal of the government from urban community development initiatives (Venkatesh, 2000). Community residents, organizers, and researchers scrambled to find a way
forward in the absence of reliable resources.

Researchers who previously had focused on community problems and needs that could be addressed with federal dollars, began looking at the strengths and assets within these depressed areas. Asset mapping became a basis for community building strategies that focused on collaborative projects linking any resource available to local communities. These community-building approaches took hold, and literature appeared that codified and analyzed such efforts (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993; Nyden, et al. 1997).

These community-building approaches provide the link to a comprehensive integration of universities and local communities. Connecting university service learning approaches with a community building strategy can create projects that provide real substance to service learning programs and significant assets and resources for struggling local communities.

**CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND APPLICATIONS**

The Community Learning-Community Building Model describes the essential components necessary for creating a comprehensive and meaningful approach that focuses on institutionalizing community engagement in both campus and community environments. The model, drawing on the work of Boyte and Kari (1996), Kretzman and McKnight (1993), and Nyden, et al. (1997), is composed of 12 elements that create layers of community ties linking students, faculty, neighborhood residents, and local agencies/organizations/institutions:

1. Equal and reciprocal relationships between community and campus are the basis of the Learning and Building Model;
2. The approach is holistic and integrated;
3. The model involves a focus on a specific neighborhood or cluster of neighborhoods;
4. Needs and assets identified by the community determine the collaborative activities;
5. Actions derive from a community building approach;
6. Programs and activities flourish throughout the neighborhood, not just in a single location or "outreach office;"
7. Service learning experiences encourage and accommodate long-term student involvement;
8. The partnership enhances the capacity of local agencies to manage student/faculty volunteers;
9. An integrated and coordinated organizational structure develops to facilitate direct communication among involved academic units and local community agencies/organizations/institutions;
10. The university promotion and tenure system recognizes, values, and rewards community involvement and community service;
11. Collaborative decision-making processes develop that reflect the different authority structures in the university and the neighborhoods;
12. Collaborations develop with local art, cultural, business, health, or social service organizations to leverage additional resources for community improvements through joint grant writing or fund raising.

The above model reflects the growth and maturation of service learning and community-based learning. It integrates such learning approaches into an overtly community-driven building process that implicates universities in transformational community and institutional change. It expands our focus from active community involvement by individual service learners to collaborative institutional involvement in community, social, and educational change. It is this level of institutional, not just individual, action that is the focus of this article.

The Community Learning-Community Building Partnership Model has provided direction for the development of a comprehensive community-based learning program at the University of Indianapolis that includes both an extensive and diverse service learning program and a series of community-based learning facilities. The model has been implemented organizationally through the Community Programs Center (CPC). Created out of an earlier Volunteers in Service Program (from 1990), the CPC staff includes two faculty assigned part time, one full time professional staff, a full time administrative assistant, and several student workers. The Center coordinates the community partnerships, develops and coordinates community-based curricula, supports student volunteer programs, collaborates with existing community partners on program initiatives, and develops new community-campus partnerships.

The University of Indianapolis, both on its own through a strategic planning process and in concert with its community partners, identified three areas where collaborations would be mutually beneficial; the Arts and Culture, Health and Human Services, and Education. Interdisciplinary initiatives gradually developed into neighborhood-based projects coordinated out of neighborhood-based facilities that both serve local residents and function as centers for higher education for a wide variety of disciplines.

**Community Arts and Education Center at Wheeler Arts**

The Wheeler Arts Community is the product of a partnership between Southeast Neighborhood Development (SEND- a community development corporation in inner city Indianapolis) and the University of Indianapolis. Formerly an abandoned carburetor factory, the now restored facility houses 36 subsidized artist studio/apartments (live-work spaces) and the U of I Community Arts and Education Center (CAEC). The CAEC includes a community theater...
(used by the Theater Department, the Indiana Theater Association, neighborhood groups, and local theater/performance groups), painting studio, art gallery, classroom, and offices for the U of I Community Programs Center. This community-based learning facility supports programs in art, theater, sociology, service learning, education, music, Spanish, writing, and health education and provides space for small conferences, retreats, banquets, and meetings for many other university schools/departments. The CAEC is utilized as well by neighborhood groups, city/community agencies, and local art groups.

**Fountain Square Center for Healing, Learning, and Serving**

The Fountain Square Center is a collaboration between Southeast Community Services (a social service agency), Southeast Health Center/HealthNet, and the University of Indianapolis. The two Southeast agencies formerly operated out of an inadequate and deteriorated building a quarter mile from the Wheeler Arts Community. Wanting to strengthen the community-based learning experiences of students in the health and human service fields, the university joined together with the two neighborhood agencies to create a unique learning environment and a greatly enhanced service facility.

In addition to the two agencies, the Fountain Square Center houses university classrooms, computer labs, exam rooms, faculty practice space, research space, offices, a medical lab, conference rooms, and a wellness center (associated with the Southeast Senior Center and the U of I Center for Aging and Community). This community-based learning facility supports programs in Applied Sociology, Gerontology, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Psychology, and Social Work.

**Indianapolis Collaboration for Urban Education**

The Collaboration for Urban Education represents a collaboration between the U of I, 11 Indianapolis Public Schools (located in the targeted Southeast Neighborhoods area), Marion County Health and Hospital Corporation, and other groups as needed. Students and faculty from across the university partner with local schools providing support, program enhancement, and facilities to both motivate students and improve/enhance student learning. U of I students and faculty assist with tutoring, mentoring, ESL classes, conflict resolution, music and arts instruction, sports physicals, vaccinations, and health education.

Most recently, the university and the Indianapolis Public Schools have established the IPS Arts Academy at Wheeler Arts. This is a middle school arts based alternative program that incorporates IPS teachers, Wheeler Arts Community artists, U. of I. faculty, graduate students, and service learning students. Arts Academy students also utilize U. of I. campus facilities (theatre, music hall, studios) on a regular basis.

**U of I Community Based Learning Programs**

These activist learning centers provide the infrastructure for practica, internships, and clinical programs across the university. Additionally, there is an extensive community service learning program closely tied to these facilities. The undergraduate service learning program includes free standing courses in several disciplines, optional service learning labs associated with some introductory courses, three-week intensive session service learning courses, service travel courses, Honor's service learning courses, Honor's service learning projects, and a minor in "Civic Engagement and Community Leadership." Service learning is integrated into several of the graduate programs as well, with free-standing courses in graduate Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Applied Sociology. Additionally, the graduate nursing program has integrated service learning across the curriculum.

The MA Program in Applied Sociology has a strong community-based component to it and the program has played a leading role in the development of activist learning sites. This has included graduate students serving as volunteer coordinators at agencies in the targeted Southeast Neighborhoods. A major limitation for many community service-learning programs is the limited capacity of the under-funded central city agencies to handle significant numbers of student service learners and volunteers. As part of the Applied Sociology curriculum, graduate students go through agency staff training and become volunteer coordinators for those agencies, acting as a link between the agencies and the university. They are primarily responsible for working with the agencies to identify tasks, recruit student service learners/volunteers, and coordinate student skills/time with agency needs. This "agency capacity enhancement" program is popular with local agencies and furthers the institutionalization of the community-campus partnership within the university, within neighborhood agencies, and in the neighborhood as a whole.

Working with the neighborhoods in these different initiatives provides multiple diverse opportunities for community-based learning for students in any field. The community-based facilities and programs create an integrated network of learning environments imbedded in the fabric of the neighborhood. These are action centers as well as learning centers. The goal is to create models for confronting the major problems facing 21st century societies and educate our students in the very environments where solutions are created and put into action. Students learn the value of community and collective action enriched by scholarship and critical thought.
Levels of Collaboration: Limited, Supportive, and Transformative

Three types of community-university collaboration can be identified out of the various arrangements that use that label, and that to some extent reflect the changes in our community-university partnership over time over time (see Figure 1). Most begin as single-purpose, short-term projects initiated by an individual or small group of faculty with a community agency (Level 1). For example, a faculty person links with a community organization or group to provide real-world experiences for students in a course or university student organization, and the community gets volunteer personnel to accomplish some tasks. These partnerships typically come and go with the initiating faculty person and the latter’s university-related needs.

Figure 1: Community-University Partnership

- Levels of Collaboration
- Level 1: Limited Relationships
  - University: Academic Depts., Support Services, Cultural/Sporting Activities
  - Community: Not for Profit Institutions, Public Agencies, For Profit Inst.
- Level 2: Supportive Collaborations
  - University: Academic Depts., Support Services, Cultural/Sporting Activities
  - Community: Not for Profit Institutions, Public Agencies, For Profit Inst.
- Level 3: Transformational Collaborations
  - University: Academic Depts., Support Services, Cultural/Sporting Activities
  - Community: Not for Profit Institutions, Public Agencies, For Profit Inst.

However, from those efforts, long-term collaborations can develop involving multiple university programs and agencies (Level 2). These partnerships provide support for key functions of the various organizations involved, but they do not substantially alter organizational boundaries or processes. Furthermore, they tend to focus on provision of services to the community that are ameliorative in addressing community needs and problems rather than change-oriented (Dolgon, 2002; Kahne and Westheimer, 1999).

We are now working toward the goal of transformative collaborations (Level 3) that will substantially change practices in both the community and the university and provide opportunities to make decisions, attract and share resources, and learn together. These transformational partnerships make possible initiatives that go well beyond what either community groups or the university could do on their own.

Issues and Dilemmas of Institutionalizing Transformative Changes Across Organizations

The following analytic insights were developed from our ongoing study of our community-university partnership and service learning efforts. We have used open-ended conversations, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews with key participants, as well as participant observation by the authors in meetings, events, and service projects, as sources of data kept in the form of detailed notes. The purpose of our data collection has primarily been to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of our community change approach in order to make adjustments and changes in an "action research" manner. Thus, our primary interest was not in developing scientifically-based generalizations. However, through a grounded approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to analyzing this data, we have developed some second-order analytic themes or categories that we think are useful for understanding some of the needs and issues that arise in a community change-oriented service learning effort.

The kind of community-university partnership we are pursuing requires a transformation in the ways organizations have traditionally operated. Transformations are extremely difficult because organizations are first and foremost concerned about their long-term stability and survival, and have developed systems of decision making and funding that provide some sense of certainty in the face of economic and political uncertainties. For example, decision-making systems within organizations usually have fixed lines of authority (Weber, 1978, 217-19, 956-57). Organizational leaders are hesitant to enter into broad, complex arrangements with other organizations where decisions cannot be fully controlled by the organization (Williamson, 1975). Organizations also have a tendency to gravitate toward arrangements and projects in which
costs and benefits can be specified and predicted over time (Williamson, 1975).

Creating a transformative partnership that, at the same time, transforms the community it serves requires a fair amount of flexibility and risk-taking in the face of uncertainty that is difficult to sustain over time. Partnerships oriented toward change require an ability to identify and pursue new initiatives while creating organizational structures for carrying out ongoing projects. Projects oriented toward change require a willingness by partnering organizations to expend costs with uncertain benefits and to develop decision making systems that are responsive to various constituencies (e.g., funders, community residents, students, other possible partners) and new opportunities. In the following, we examine some issues related to the sharing of authority, measuring and distributing the costs and benefits of initiatives, integrating expert and local or "street" knowledge, and developing effective change agents.

Problems of Authority, Responsibility/Accountability, and Liability

"Doing change" at a transformative level requires identifying goals to be pursued together and making decisions about who does what and how costs and benefits are to be distributed. Organization of this kind requires the development of communication and decision-making processes that will produce decisions in a timely manner that can be supported by various university and community constituents. As described earlier, the Community Programs Center established by the university has facilitated the development of Centers that bring together faculty and community members to focus on a range of initiatives. At present, these groups are guided by committees that serve as advisory groups—groups that can provide feedback on ideas, recommend certain actions, and in many cases engage in activities on behalf of their organizations. A Community Programs Advisory Committee (CPAC), consisting of representatives from different university programs, community agencies, and neighborhood groups, has met monthly over the last few years as a forum for sharing information about community and university events, discussing community change opportunities, and providing feedback on change efforts underway.

In comparison to other organizations, universities are somewhat unique in that professors have some autonomy to initiate change efforts in the community related to their academic interests and expertise with minimal oversight from administration, especially if these initiatives are small in scope and require few university resources. But large-scale involvements require the support of the university administration. Community agencies also have key decision-makers that must give their support to resource-intensive or high profile projects. In general, organizational leaders are often reluctant to give up some of their authority on decisions that affect the activities and resources of the organization to members of other organizations or inter-organizational bodies.

Although we have begun to span the organizational divides by creating inter-organizational committees and positions, we have not devised a general solution to the problem of shared decision making. A stop-gap solution has been to educate university administrators about the community, other organizations, and the benefits of partnering and community change relative to the costs and other possible goals. The Community Programs Center has facilitated meetings and informational gatherings such as open houses that provide senior administrators with opportunities to learn about ongoing work and be involved in project activities. It has also coordinated the development of formal agreements and policies.

At a more practical, day-to-day level, we have struggled with the problem of who should be authorized to make decisions in concrete situations involving inter-organizational actions. For example, situations have arisen in which "organizational spanners" such as volunteer coordinators were not sure if they were authorized to make a decision on a course of action. Relatedly, when organizational interests might conflict, whose interests should organizational spanners represent? We have had the case of a project leader representing the university and a volunteer coordinator assisting with providing settings for the service project disagree over a course of action. It is likely that in change initiatives involving multiple organizations and people with different competences, decision-making processes and policies cannot and should not be fully specified.

Organizational spanners and shared decision making present a set of problems related to authority that require solutions if our partnership is to successfully continue along a transformative path. We must begin to address issues of responsibility or accountability for the actions of individuals acting on behalf of multiple groups, as well as liability given our litigious society. Working for change in the community presents a set of risks that universities are not used to dealing with in their traditionally cloistered settings. Similarly, community members are not always attuned to the rules and expectations in university settings. These risks and uncertainties can produce ambivalence on the part of organizational leaders who are charged with protecting their particular organizations from financial and political harm.

Assessing, Justifying, and Distributing Costs and Benefits

Although our university and the large majority of community organizations we work with are non-profit organizations, a primary—perhaps the primary—consideration of those organizations is maintaining their financial viability, since organizations cannot survive unless they balance their ledgers. Our university has contributed substantial funds for building rents, full and part-time staff, and faculty release time. Some leverage for making these
commitments has come from the university's strong service mission. But in the long run, chief administrators, who are understandably focused on the economic costs and benefits of initiatives, want some direct financial benefits or evidence of indirect benefits such as publicity for their organizations or gains in learning or community well-being. Indirect benefits are especially important in the early development of change initiatives when financial returns are minimal and gains are unclear.

To a great extent, transformational change requires a leap of faith that certain start-up and projected costs will be justified by long-term benefits that tend to be uncertain. For example, community change initiatives and service learning programs provide no guarantee to partners that grant funds will be forthcoming or that significant change or meaningful learning will occur. Universities have no guarantee that students will be attracted or retained in increasing numbers. There are also costs in time and energy expended by participants who must do this work, often in addition to the work required in their home organizations, until roles and relationships are transformed. Time constraints and the need for frequent meetings to think through, plan, and implement change efforts lead to meeting burn-out, especially since these meetings are in addition to the usual meetings university and community agency personnel must attend in their respective organizations.

One clear benefit to all parties involved has been the influx of funds that would not have been attracted without the partnership. Increasingly, partnerships and collaborations are important in the grant-making arena. Funders are eager to support innovative programs resulting from truly integrated partnerships. Of U is highly regarded by funders in the Indianapolis area and has served as an anchor for major projects including the Fountain Square Center and the Wheeler Arts Community. Over $3.5 million has been brought into the neighborhood in large grants (over $100,000) alone, not including community development corporation funds. It is unlikely the neighborhood would have attracted these funds without the involvement of the university. These funds have had a clear impact on supporting our change efforts.

Despite these fairly clear gains, we continue to struggle with the problem of projecting and measuring costs and benefits. At the university, we have begun to track the extent of student involvement in terms of volunteer and service learning hours. Service learning students have been sharing and displaying evidence of their work with the university community at informational fairs held at the end of each semester. These short-term, anecdotal forms of evidence have been important for informing and nurturing the support and involvement of administrators and faculty. Faculty involvement, though perhaps harder to track, is evident in the increase in service learning courses and the expansion of community-based curricula. From a "service learning enclave" of two core faculty in Social Sciences, service learning and community-based learning has spread to the majority of departments on campus.

Most elusive are the results or outcomes of these efforts in terms of actual transformation in the community and university. Census and other publicly accessible forms of data are available for assessing community change. But changes indicated by those data are unlikely to be significant in the short run and offer a limited frame of reference. We know from anecdotal accounts and our own experiences that service learning is impacting faculty teaching and student learning, but we have no system for collecting, analyzing, and evaluating data on how teaching and learning are being affected, or how this learning is affecting the community. In short, we have much work to do to systematically document the results of our efforts and put that information in forms that will be useful for various partners in making decisions about our work.

Other research concerns include making research relevant to different groups and avoiding the dissemination of research that might hurt the neighborhood in some manner. Neighborhood organizations and residents do not share the same interests in research as university researchers and can be skeptical about its relevance or usefulness, which is not surprising given the history of university research discussed earlier. They are skeptical of research that seems to be mostly for the sake of university members' academic career advancement. In addition, researchers have an ethical obligation to do no harm to research participants. Care must be taken to avoid presenting an unduly negative image of the neighborhood to community leaders, funders, and the popular press that might lead to less support for change. This requires thoughtful consideration and communication by participating researchers as well as educating and involving community agencies and neighborhood groups in research and evaluation activities.

Another problem is maintaining a balance of cost and benefits among partners in community change. The establishment of the volunteer coordinator positions was an effort by the university to provide some relief for agencies that are short-staffed and lack the capacity to effectively train and supervise student volunteers and service learning participants. This has been a win-win situation in that the agencies have had their staff expanded to more effectively place volunteers with minimal cost and students have benefited from a greater variety and quality of experiences. But these positions were established with grant funds, and we are still considering how to institutionalize them when those funds are gone. Questions about who should pay for what and when continue to present problems, especially when it involves capital expenditures such as buildings and furnishings, but also as organizational boundary-spanning positions and projects are developed.
Sharing Professional and Local Expertise and Building Trust

One of the clear needs in community change efforts is to bring together expert knowledge with local knowledge about neighborhood life and people. Our experience suggests that community change cannot simply occur through different partners contributing their knowledge and expertise from their different camps, but through a concerted effort of all partners to learn about the community, including the common needs, practices, and perceptions of the different partners involved. Change leaders need a deep understanding of the "street knowledge" one gains from living and working in a neighborhood. Community agencies and neighborhood groups also need an understanding of how universities and the academic world function.

As part of his work as Community Programs Director, one of the authors (Maher) was granted release time to spend in the neighborhood meeting with and deepening relationships with community members, making new acquaintances and organizational connections, and getting to know the day-to-day life of the neighborhood. Initial efforts expanded into a Community Programs Center with paid staff charged with keeping in touch with community and university needs, promoting partnership development, and providing support for partnership work. Having staff dedicated to collaboration has helped cement relationships and provide "translators" who can move knowledgeably across university and community settings. Knowledge sharing has proliferated through inter-organizational committees, faculty and student work in neighborhood settings, and integration of community members' knowledge and experience into university courses.

Local knowledge provides insights into whom to ask (or not ask) for what, where to ask, when to ask, and the kinds of justifications that different people view as reasonable. Local knowledge helps us understand what partners are capable of contributing and when it is reasonable to expect those contributions. This kind of knowledge takes time to develop and cannot come from a few meetings or a short research project. Spending time getting to know people also provides an opportunity to develop a sense of familiarity and trust, and fosters a greater willingness to take action for the benefit of others. We have to be knowledgeable about our partners and trust that they can and will do what they say in the face of uncertainty.

Trust between organizations and trust among the people who represent those organizations and communities refers to the belief that the "other" understands and empathizes with oneself or one's own group and can fairly and accurately represent partners' views to outsiders. It is based on a common agreement that both (or all) parties are committed to the partnership over the long-term, that is, it transcends (though includes) immediate activities and projects. Such trust develops out of extensive time and emotional commitment not clearly tied to one's own gain. For university faculty/staff it means attending meetings at inconvenient times, providing support for community groups on local issues and in fund raising, and sharing in the joys and grief of community life.

The kind of knowledge bridging we have undertaken has been facilitated by our university's service mission. Faculty and student involvement in the community are taken seriously, with faculty service counting significantly toward promotion and tenure and student service being recognized through service hours being indicated on transcripts, credit-bearing service learning courses, a minor dedicated to community service and leadership, and service awards. But knowledge of the community does not necessarily translate into an orientation toward change. We turn to a brief examination of that problem.

Developing Institutions and Agents of Change

Perhaps the biggest long-term problem we face is institutionalizing for change. As has already been mentioned, organizations institutionalize processes and practices that are intended to provide stability and predictability. Historically, these have worked against transformative change. Change initiatives require some level of institutionalization in terms of processes and practices that facilitate moving across organizational boundaries, blending decision making processes, and distributing costs and benefits in a manner that promotes continuing participation.

However, institutional policies are only as good as the people who enact them. One of our primary goals of pursuing transformative change relationships is to educate our students, faculty, administrators, and community members about change itself. We have growing evidence that some knowledge and skills are necessary for university and community members to be able to work together in ways that promote change. One question with which we are struggling is how much do participants at various levels need to know or be able to do prior to working together? Service learning approaches tend to assume that learning experientially in "real" settings is preferable to classroom learning in "artificial" settings. But students and faculty can do real harm to communities and relationships if they are completely unprepared for what they might experience, especially when there are significant cultural differences (Guthrie, 2000).

As the partnership expands to include new community groups and university members, and the normal turnover of organizations brings in new people, a socialization process is needed to help new participants learn about the community and adopt a change orientation that is transformationally focused and not simply "charity work" (Kahne & Westheimer, 1999). It is not clear to us to what extent change can be institutionalized in terms of the development of a system of rules and protocols. But we have developed change-oriented positions
and groups that emphasize inclusive decision-making processes, sensitivity to the problems and concerns of those in different contexts, and a long-term "win-win" orientation toward the distribution of costs and benefits.

**CONCLUSION: BUILDING TRUST THROUGH FOCUSED, LONG-TERM COMMITMENTS AND EVERYDAY PRACTICES**

A few elements of our community change partnerships seem essential to the successes we have experienced and the momentum that has developed in and around them. First, we have focused on a partnership with a particular neighborhood. This has allowed us to develop deep, sustained relationships and sense of shared identity. Second, a complex web of relationships has been fostered. This allows specific projects to come and go without destroying the general sense of direction. It also provides multiple opportunities for a fairly large group of individuals representing different constituencies to work together, promoting familiarity with organizations, initiatives, and people. Third, we have partnered with existing community-based organizations to create facilities and innovative programs that enhance and strengthen community-building efforts and provide students with unique learning opportunities, further integrating the university into the community.

Over time, this familiarity breeds the trust among change participants that is necessary for combating the insecurities that come with the uncertainty that is an inherent part of change. But this trust must be fed, not only through good intentions, but the thoughtful development of change institutions that provide means for making decisions and equitably distributing costs and benefits. This trust, likewise, must be supported by participants with adequate social and cultural knowledge and respect for community hopes and aspirations.

The activist learning approach discussed in this paper is a comprehensive change model focused on developing transformational partnerships between communities and universities to address immediate community needs and issues as well as educating future residents and leaders on effective community building strategies. Such transformational partnerships can do much more than that, exposing not just students but also faculty and staff to the richness of community life and the importance of community relationships over commodity accumulation.

Sociologists are uniquely situated to play important roles in this transformation of the academy. Not only are sociologists likely to have nurtured such community relationships and engaged students in local community action, we have as part of our professional education an understanding of institutional and community change.

Dale (2000), Dolgon (2002), and Ostrow, Hesser, and Enos (1999) have extensively analyzed ways to teach sociology in community settings through service learning, action research, or as Dale refers to it, collaborative action learning. These approaches clearly focus on ways to create community learning environments that involve not charity but social change. The implication for sociology of the approach described in this paper is that it incorporates not just individual faculty/students, but also institutions (including but not limited to universities) in social change processes.

The establishment of a "campus" in the neighborhood as a response to community identified needs provides an important platform for creating community learning environments. But just as important is the message such institutional actions have for students, community residents, and the city as a whole. When students see the university doing what they are being encouraged to do, the impact is powerful and persuasive. Students are not just being "sent out into the community," they are being invited to join with the university in creating positive social change at the community level. Likewise, community residents may appreciate students involved in doing community work but when the university as an institution responds as an institution and becomes involved in collaborative community change processes, people take notice. It has a major impact on the community's self perception and what it believes it can achieve as a community.

The energy and excitement generated by such engagement quickly becomes evident to other community groups ("how can we get our local university/college involved like that in our community?"). In these times of restrictive budgets, deficits, and growing social and community problems, city governments can become eager allies as well.

This is sociology in the neighborhood, sociology in action.

*An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Annual Meetings of the Southern Sociological Society, New Orleans, LA, March 26-29, 2003.

**REFERENCES**


