

Knight, Aimée. *Community Is the Way: Engaged Writing and Designing for Transformative Change*. The WAC Clearinghouse, 2022; 125 pp.: 9781646423149, \$19.95 (pbk)

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*Universities have increasingly demonstrated a desire to develop collaborative relationships with members of their local community. The question becomes how to ethically develop these community partnerships in a way that is mutually beneficial for both the community and the university. In *Community is the Way: Engaged Writing and Designing for Transformative Change*, Amiée Knight offers instructors with an approach to engage with communities and build community partnerships. Knight argues that community-based partnerships must be committed to equity-based and decolonial approaches or risk forming failed or even parasitic relationships with community organizations. For Knight, equity and justice is the goal for community-based partnerships, a goal that acknowledges and legitimizes a community's assets, practices, and ways of being. She*

maintains that writing teachers and scholars invested in community writing must consciously redesign the way they think about and develop community writing initiatives to develop mutually beneficial relationships. Knight describes the book as a field guide for those who want to pursue community-based work. In *Community is the Way*, Knight provides hands-on tactics and practices that one can apply in their own community building work.

Knight structures the field guide in two parts over the course of four body chapters. In the first half, she outlines guiding principles to develop an equity-based approach to community writing. She begins by outlining a trend in higher education to invest in community-engaged projects that has existed since the 1990s. She describes how such partnerships have the potential to benefit both universities and community organizations allowing for, for example, relevant scholarship and instruction to the former, and access to resources for the latter. But it ain't all good. Knight insists that "in addition to the problem of unethical partnerships, infrastructure and resources remain significant hurdles" (15). In an effort to attend to these institutional shortcomings, Knight proposes three guiding principles when developing community-based partnerships: 1) focus on communities' strengths and assets, 2) prioritize co-creation of knowledge with partners, and 3) work towards change in the process of community work. These principles guide her "equity-based approach" to community writing (34). She describes this approach "not as linear steps in a process but as approaches or possibilities for engagement that center equity when collaborating with communities" (36). This approach includes: 1) building empathy, 2) co-creating knowledge, 3) iterative/ recursive research methods and writing practices, and 4) self-evaluation while conducting community-based work. Knight uses the first half of the book, then, to as a starting point to help guide the goals and process of developing community writing initiatives.

While she uses the first half of the book to describe the theoretical underpinnings of her “equity-based approach” to community writing, Knight uses the second half of the book to describe practical strategies that others can use in their own classrooms. When working with community partners, Knight insists that “the social justice turn must be accompanied by the decolonial turn in writing studies” (43). For Knight, despite the call for equity in writing studies, few resources exist to explicitly address methods for engaging with community partners. She provides three potential approaches to community writing that encourage shared production in knowledge making and project development: 1) production oriented, 2) training-oriented, and 3) research-oriented projects. These projects are meant to exist as possible final projects for community-writing courses. To scaffold these projects, Knight offers smaller classroom projects to help students “leverage media platforms to advocate with and for community organizations” (59). Projects include: 1) design question analysis, 2) social media analysis, 3) comparative media analysis, 4) golden circle analysis, 5) social object rhetorical analysis, and 6) organization storytelling. While the first two projects can be understood as initial collaborative steps (identifying projects and identifying community assets), projects three, four, and five can be understood as research strategies aimed at providing students with models of effective media that can help them attend to partner needs and desires. Project 6 encourages students to leverage a community’s multimedia to help tell their story. Knight insists that educators can edit, combine, and revise any of these assignments for their classroom and showcase them as a report for their community partners at the end of the semester.

Community is the Way offers a helpful starting point for writing instructors who want to prioritize community writing projects in

their classroom. Knight does an effective job of outlining the historical shortcomings of such work. But she also provides readers with both theoretical and practical approaches on how we should think about and develop community partnerships in the classroom. Knight acknowledges that the process of community building will “require a continued reimagining of our approaches to program building” (91), and she recognizes this book as a tool in that process. Knight’s work ultimately contributes to the social justice turn in writing studies, answering the call for a more reflexive engagement with community partners that include “equity-focused approaches to collaborative partnerships that call on community’s resources and strengths” (5). As instructors and program administrators seek to interrogate the systems they’ve built and the role they play in their community, *Community is the Way* underscores practical means to develop transformative change through community engagement.

Post-pandemic, writing instructors and program administrators can and should use this book as a tool to help them build and re-build community both in and outside of the academy. A major benefit of Knight’s work is that it acknowledges how community writing projects can be “messy, complex” work (34). As such, this book does not provide a universal approach to community writing. Rather, *Community is the Way* provides a flexible model of possibilities that instructors can use in their own courses. Knight prioritizes “21st Century Literacies” (90) that include website development, visual mapping, and social media analysis. As such, both instructors who are looking to explore new literacy practices in the classroom and instructors looking to expand how they can use new literacy practices for community engaged work can benefit from this read. *Community is the Way* is practical guide for instructors who are already committed to community reading and for those who are seeking ways to get into community work.

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