

## Review:

### Harry C. Boyte (Ed.). *Democracy's Education: Public Work, Citizenship, & The Future of Colleges and Universities*

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**R**eflections on the intricate relationships between labor and intellectualism, jobs and vocations, and institutions and communities are woven throughout Harry C. Boyte's edited collection, *Democracy's Education: Public Work, Citizenship, & The Future of Colleges and Universities*. This 27-chapter book is a product of the American Commonwealth Partnership, an intra-institutional project initiated to re-theorize the role of higher education in a contemporary democratic society. While the collection features a host of different arguments, it succeeds in placing these voices in vibrant conversation with another, encouraging readers to construct their own opinions on democracy's place at all levels of education.

In his introduction, Boyte positions citizenship in between labor and intellectual endeavors, which have historically been separated (9-10). He argues that this gap can be bridged by re-conceptualizing citizenship **as** work and provides three ways to aid this shift:

community-building, vocational and civic professionalism, and the democratization of public work (15). After offering a brief history of civic engagement in the university setting, Boyte urges us “to recall and translate to the twenty-first century a democratic story of higher education and education broadly at the vital center of America” (p. 29). Emphasizing the communal nature of this call, this collection features voices ranging from administrators to community agencies. Such a collection of viewpoints is refreshing for community engagement scholars in rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies, as we continue to search for more representation of community partner feedback in our own projects (Kimme Hea & Wendler Shah, 2016).

The book’s five central sections focus on different types of stakeholders (policy makers and presidents; faculty; students and alumni; and community members and organizers), bookended by chapters that contextualize the claims made in the core of the book. The first section explores overarching democratic narratives that expand some of the claims made in the introduction, while the last two parts of the book situate civic engagement work in larger institutional structures—specifically calling for the establishment of civic engagement as a fixed strategy of higher education, rather than an outcome retrofitted to an institution’s mission. Despite the varied visions of the relationship between education and democracy, the heart of this collection rests upon the notion that we must position education as “a great civic vocation, a vital form of public work” (29)—a positioning that only continues to increase in relevance.

The collection is precise in its content, developing the concerns that Boyte points out in his introduction: shared problem-solving within communities, the development of a workforce interested in public affairs, and the expansion of democracy through everyday work. These themes are not new to theories of democracy, as seen in both John Dewey’s concern with the development of the Great Community and Alexis de Tocqueville’s discussions of labor and education (theorists referenced by a number of authors in the collection); however, contributors take up these themes in new ways. For example, Romand Coles and Blase Scarnati, in “Transformational Ecotones: The craftsperson ethos and higher education” (Chapter 10), lament the separation of labor and democracy, arguing that we

should frame careers as vocations intimately linked to our needs as social creatures, using the metaphor of the craftsman to advance their argument. (Interestingly, there is no mention of *techné* or *praxis*, concepts that would enhance this conversation). They draw upon “engaged democratic pedagogy” (p. 119) which positions teachers, students, and community members as builders of collaborative community infrastructures: one of the three major ways to change citizenship Boyte puts forth in the introduction. These discussions of agency and action that involve multiple stakeholders, embodying the spirit of reciprocity, are undoubtedly valuable for teachers invested in public and community rhetorics.

Another central theme of this collection is the potential for public change through the linkage of civic and vocational aspirations. According to Boyte, creating curricula that position jobs as careers, or better yet, callings, encourages us to see work as undeniably public. John Spencer’s “Reflections of a Civic Scientist” (Chapter 22) argues that a democratic frame must be placed onto research, asking us to acknowledge that scientific findings are, indeed, political and should be publicly accessible (p. 213). Though this approach is undoubtedly powerful, it is also often difficult to enact; one of the strengths of this volume is its acknowledgement of the difficulties faced by individuals in higher education who wish to forward this mission. In Chapter 11, KerryAnn O’Meara explores the trajectories of an under-appreciated social sciences faculty member and a celebrated hard sciences researcher, commenting on their vastly different destinations. She acknowledges the tension that faculty may feel between their scholarly pursuits and community work, in turn, urging us to root out any bias against public-facing scholarship in our own institutions (p. 130).

Seemingly in response to these complexities, other chapters provide examples of civic engagement models that have successfully democratized public work. Robert Bruininks et al.’s “Institutionalizing Civic Engagement at the University of Minnesota” (Chapter 6) directly engages with this concern on both a theoretical and practical level, offering their institution’s efforts as an example of sustainable engagement. The authors write that community engagement can be used as a strategy to advance educational missions, positioning it as

“a source of new vitality, resources, and renewal of American higher education” (p. 90), making this the chapter that most clearly echoes Boyte’s claim in the introduction that civic engagement ought to be an embedded strategy, not an end-goal. They also emphasize the importance of creating metrics for evaluating community engagement on such a scale—a need referenced in literature across our field (Bringle & Hatcher 1999; Feldman, 2009; Kendrick & Suarez, 2003).

Several chapters in this book hold valuable lessons specifically for instructors committed to service learning. Scott J. Peters’ “A Democracy’s College Tradition” (Chapter 2) details the history of land grant colleges, suggesting that asking “political” questions about the purpose and legacy of land grant institutions is one method we can use to develop community engagement programs on these campuses (p. 48). Most notably, he advocates that all institutions locate themselves within larger narratives of democracy. Other contributors, such as David Hoffman (Chapter 15) and Peter Levine (Chapter 21), discuss their work with student-driven initiatives and on STEM-heavy campuses. Both of these chapters explore the possibilities for experiential learning to foster skills that can be transferred to other scenarios, creating engaged and prepared citizen-professionals. Though none of the contributors focus explicitly on writing or rhetoric, many of these chapters echo long-developing conversations in our own field about pedagogy, reciprocity, and institutional influence (Baca, 2012; Cella, 2013; Deans, 2003).

At the end of the anthology, Boyte offers strategies to foster more collaborative understanding of engagement, all of which re-position the university as a *member* of the community, rather than just a *partner*. He calls for “a common table” where all stakeholders can address contemporary problems and introduce solutions (p. 265), which resonates with the work of community literacy scholars like Linda Flowers, Ellen Cushman, and Steve Parks. Ultimately, Boyte’s collection provides insight as to how civic engagement is being discussed across academic fields; additionally, the collection’s focus on developing sustainable models of civic engagement is timely, given the uncertain future of higher education. This collection would be particularly useful for anyone interested in interdisciplinary engagement work, given the range of programs and positions

discussed in the book, as well as individuals interested in implementing programs in their own communities and institutions, due to the plethora of examples provided in this anthology. The perspectives expressed in *Democracy's Education* are incredibly powerful and could serve as transformative lenses for scholars in writing studies and related fields who view civic engagement as an integral part of their work.

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