The Historical and Contemporary Relevance of the Interconnectivity of Community, Community-Based Education, and Transformative Education

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ABSTRACT

This manuscript examines the past and present frameworks for conceptualizing community, community-based education, and their relationship to transformative education/learning. A case is made for the importance of community-based education providers serving as a mechanism for the engagement for such learning.

KEYWORDS

Community, Community-Based Education, Education, Formal, Informal, Leadership, Life-Long Learning

INTRODUCTION

Every individual is a member of some kind of community and each, whether deliberately or unintentionally, engage in learning provided within their social milieu. Moreover, communities are diverse entities. It is through this diversity that adult learners find educational opportunities to engage in purposeful or transformative learning. This manuscript examines the past and present frameworks for conceptualizing community, community-based education and their relationship to transformative education/learning. A case is made for the importance of community-based education providers serving as a mechanism for the engagement for such learning through community leadership development programs (CLDPs) which is an example of a community resource, developed by people in community, and is tied to issues of concern to the community and emergence of issues requiring people to work on them. Additionally, many programs support alumni groups and programming for those who completed the community-based program (J. Maloney, Personal Papers, 1989). Some communities have even developed youth program, early career programs, traditional programs and even seniors programs. Colleges may also have such programs for those attending them. CLDPs also encourage continuing community education by supporting "alumni" organizations of graduates. In other communities alumni groups may be separately incorporated.

Community-based educational providers, such as libraries, religious institutions, senior citizen centers, museums, business and industry, community colleges, state and regional universities, vocational and technical institutions, health related organizations, the mass media, to name a few, are positioned to assist in the design and development of community-based lifelong learning communities and the provision of transformative learning opportunities. Formal and informal learning opportunities should be available to community members of all ages in a wide variety of community settings.

Principles associated with community-based education are grounded in the notion that each and every community member has a right to be involved in the identification and resolution of individual and community needs through a democratic participatory process (Brady, 2006; Cohen, 1985). The total community, including all public organizations and agencies, is positioned to serve as the vehicle for bring about change and meeting identified needs.

Defining Community

The word "community" comes from the Latin term, "Communis," meaning fellowship or common relations and feelings (Engel, 1994). Community is a value-laden term that evokes a variety of descriptions by a diverse range of individuals (Bellah et al., 1985; Effrat, 1974, Luloff & Swanson, 1990; Moore & Feldt, 1993). The concept of community is multidimensional in scope and perspective and generates a host of definitions, missions, aims, and images. Galbraith (1900a, p. 8) suggests that individuals in the United States live in a mega-community that is international, national, and local in scope and defines mega-community as a "large scale systematic community that is connected by cultural, social, psychological, economic, political, Environmental, and technological elements."

Tonnies (1957) used the terms "gemeinschaft" and "gesellschaft" to describe two ways of how people relate to each other. A gemeinschaft community is characteristic of families, neighborhoods, and friendship groups that relate to each other in a sense of mutuality, stability, common identity and concerns, and a common subscription to social norms, bonds and obligations. Tonnies further notes that a gesellschaft community is one in which people relate to each other in a means-ends relationship. Various forms of exchange characterize it with other people for the primary purpose of serving individual interests. There is little sentiment involved and the rationality within such a community is high in that shared identity, mutuality, and a common concern is absent (McGuire, 1988). Between the two conceptual types of communities, it would suggest that a community that is characterized by gemeinschaft seems most appropriate to bring about a democratic and harmonious process for engaging in lifelong learning opportunities.

Warren (1978, p.1) suggests the idea of community is deceptively simple, "so long as one does not ask for a rigid definition." He found through a meta-analysis of some ninety-four definitions of community that sixty-nine such definitions included social interaction, common ties, and locational criteria as definitive of the concept. The emphasis on human interaction and relationships within places, commonalities in interests, values, and mores are frequently cited attributes of community. Warren ultimately defined community to be "that combination of social units and systems which perform the major social functions having locality relevance" (p. 9). In an earlier publication, Warren (1970) coined the phrase "the good community" in which a community is concerned with primary group relationships, autonomy, viability, power distribution, participation, commitment, heterogeneity, neighborhood control, and the extent of conflict exhibited. A good community is people-oriented, controlled, and democratic in nature. It is concerned with the capacity of local people to confront their problems through concerted actions, directing themselves to the distribution of power, arranging for participation and commitment in community affairs, understanding how differences among people can be tolerated, and debating the extent of neighborhood control and conflict. Fellin (1987) echoes similar characteristics of a good community by describing a community as a group in which membership is valued as an end in its self. Kanter (1972) contends that the search for the good community is a quest for direction and purpose in the collective anchoring of the individual life.

The above definitional perspectives are considered geographic and locational. According to Galbraith (1990b), however, others suggest that the emphasis should focus on the commonalities, of interests, concerns, and functions of people. Indeed, there are diverse ways of defining "community." To define community strictly as geographical or locational would hamper the richness of its meaning and purpose. Accepting the diversity of such perspectives, hence, Galbraith (1990a) suggests that community may be defined as "the combination and interrelationships of geographic, locational, and

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