Scholarship of engagement: Teaching and research as community-based service

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Abstract
Service-learning and community-based participatory research can both reify successful directions of a scholarship of engagement towards innovation and inclusive practices. Reciprocity, shared responsibilities, effective communication, and open decision-making environments appear to be core concepts in activating a partnership between the university and the community in order to enhance civic responsibility and train engaged citizens, by addressing societal issues and contributing to the public good.
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1. Introduction

In 1990 Ernest Boyer published his special report 'Scholarship Reconsidered. Priorities of the professoriate', a document that is still considered a reference text in approaching the concept of scholarship and the evolution of its dimensions in the higher education system. The report highlights the changes in the vision of what the priorities of faculties should be, starting with the USA's Colonial Colleges, where the aim of education was not scholarly achievement, but 'intellectual, moral, and spiritual development' (Boyer, 1990, p. 4), through to the early 1990s when the Harvard president claimed: 'At bottom most of the American institutions of higher education are filled with the modem democratic spirit of serviceableness' (*ivi*, p.5), and where the notion of 'democratic community' started in this way to affect the conception and the

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function of the professoriate. Later, with the wave of a deeper influence by the European dimension, a focus on research activity[1] can be traced as a primary interest for the college professor.

In this overview, Boyer deeply addressed the relationship between scholarship and community by emphasising that, besides teaching and research, "the work of the academy must relate to the world beyond the campus" (*ivi*, p.75). The dimensions of this relationship are clearly expressed through a set of principles which inspire students concerning (1) activating the connection of thought to action; (2) tracing interdependence between self-benefit and service; (3) channelling knowledge and purpose to "humane ends" (*ivi*, p.78); and (4) shaping a citizenry that can promote the public good (*ibidem*).

Since before the advent of the twenty-first century, Boyer proclaimed the need to reconsider the idea of scholarship in a way that could promote and satisfy social imperatives; towards this end, his awareness brought four dimensions to the categorisation of scholarship: the "scholarship of discovery", the "scholarship of integration", the "scholarship of application", and the "scholarship of teaching". Even if each dimension accomplishes a specific function, they are all meant to address the complexity of modem life, and the education/training requirements needed to "help students see beyond themselves and better understand the interdependent nature of our world" (p. 77).

That interdependence is well expressed by the synergy between research activity (the scholarship of discovery), its implications for the community at an interdisciplinary level (the scholarship of integration), student orientation and support (the scholarship of application), and the transformative connotation for both actors of the teaching–learning process (the scholarship of teaching).

In the United States, the twenty-first century response to the open vision underlined by Boyer and the higher education institutions "increasingly turned to community engagement as a natural evolution of their traditional missions of service to recognize ties to their communities along with their commitments to the social contract between society and higher education" (Sandmann et al., 2009a, p. 1).

A direction that shows the dimension of a mutually beneficial partnerships, and that was encouraged by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (CFAT), provides a documentation framework that "defines the areas where a campus can find evidence if it has institutionalized engagement" (Sandman et al., 2009b, p. 100), and can help universities gather information

[1] As underlined by Boyer (1990, p.15) 'the word "research" was first used in England in the 1870s by reformers who wished to make Cambridge and Oxford "not only a place of teaching, but a place of learning" and it was later introduced to American higher education in 1906 by Daniel Coit Gilman.'

about their commitments and activities that can be categorised as having the following purpose:

"The purpose of community engagement is the partnership (of knowledge and resources) between colleges and universities and the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching, and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good." (CFAT, 2020).

In the European context (Aramburuzabala et al., 2019), the focus on service learning is also testified to by the foundation of the European Observatory of Service-Learning in Higher Education (EOSLHE)[2], the European Association of Service-Learning in Higher Education (EASLHE)[3], and the Spanish University Service-Learning Association – ApS(U)[4].

2. Scholarship of engagement

Boyer contributed to the first issue of the *Journal of public service & outreach* (1996) with his enlightening article "Scholarship of engagement", an intellectual scientific output that, thanks to its actuality and pivotal relevance, was republished in 2016 on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary issue of the journal, which by this point had been renamed the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*.

[2] EOSLHE (https://www.eoslhe.eu/) https://www.eoslhe.eu/easlhe/) is the Observatory created in 2019 as a tool, within the 'Europe Engage' European network, to disseminate information, practices, and policies connected to service-learning in higher education in Europe. The last annual report on its research activity of data collection and analysis of service-learning experiences also features a specific section about e-Service-Learning (e-SL) practices during the COVID-19 emergency period with reflections on a methodological–didactic perspective (Ribeiro et al., 2021).

[3] EASLHE (https://www.eoslhe.eu/easlhe/) was founded in 2017 as a network based on the conversion of a partnership working on the previous initiative at EU level, which was the project "Europe Engage" (2014–2017) that was aimed at investigating existing practices and developing best practices related to service-learning. The main goal of EOSLHE is to "create an intersectorial, international and multicultural network of European professionals to promote S-L as an innovative pedagogical approach that has an impact on the development of engaged citizenship in Europe in a collaborative manner".

[4] ApS(U) (https://www.apsuniversitario.org/) was created in 2017 with the mission of fostering the exchange of experiences and practices of Service-Learning among the Spanish universities, and to promote, at a wider level, educational projects, activities, and research to support the processes of the institutionalisation of Service-Learning.

The journal mission was to offer the opportunity of not only exchanging ideas among scholars and practitioners of outreach, but specifically to activate a collaborative network that could integrate the concept of service (and practicality) with scholarship (Frum, 2016). This intention was well expressed by Boyer with his phrase "to serve the larger purpose", furtherly explained as follows:

> "At one level, the scholarship of engagement means connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems, to our children, to our schools, to our teachers, and to our cities […].
>
> But, at a deeper level, I have this growing conviction that what's also needed is not just more programs, but a larger purpose, a larger sense of mission, a larger clarity of direction in the nation's life as we move toward century twenty-one. Increasingly, I'm convinced that ultimately, the scholarship of engagement also means creating a special climate in which the academic and civic cultures communicate more continuously and more creatively with each other, helping to enlarge what anthropologist Clifford Geertz describes as the universe of human discourse and enriching the quality of life for all of us." (Boyer, 1996, p. 27).

Overcoming critical issues, and social and cultural discrepancies (e.g. in the access to information and education) that characterise the "universe of human discourse" cannot find a strategy other than the construction of a community-based discourse, that is, a broader sense of university as a "communicative structure" able to educate the whole person.

In this direction of civic renewal and integral development of the person, as a learner and as a citizen, a number of initiatives trace the transformative path of scholarship. An example is the Engagement Scholarship Consortium (ESC)[5], whose roots go back to the Inaugural conference "Best Practices in Outreach and Public Service, The Scholarship of Engagement for the 21st Century" hosted by Pennsylvania State University in 1999. The consortium's mission is to build strong university-community partnerships, and is well expressed by its collaborative connotation. ESC is, in fact, a non-profit educational organisation composed of higher education institutions and both state-public and private institutions, thus creating a synergy that can ensure the achievement of the goals included in ESC's scholarly agenda, which are a broad and varied list of research directions in terms of nature and effort.

[5] ESC (https://engagementscholarship.org/) is a consortium composed of different member institutions, a mix of state-public and private higher education institutions with the shared goal of building strong university–community partnerships. Its rich scholarly agenda includes challenge-driven international research interests concerning: promoting engaged scholarship as a criterion influencing higher education faculty performance evaluations; assessing impacts of community-campus partnerships; and disseminating and promoting research in the field.

Initiatives – such as the ones promoted by ESC – embrace a host of experiences where scholars and actors in the larger external community focus their effort by merging different dimensions. Among its numerous activities, ESC advocates the education of the public on effective practices for community change. The same insistence on the public dimensions of educational work can be found in the effort to conceptualise the scholarship of engagement, as theorised by Barker (2004) with his taxonomy of five distinct practices: (1) public scholarship, (2) participatory research, (3) community partnerships, (4) public information networks, and (5) civic literacy scholarship.

While each of these distinct practices has a specific focus, they all contribute to the progress of social inclusion at different levels: the problem-based approach in open discussions in respect to issues of wide concern (public scholarship), and in specific space-time interventions to respond to minority or marginalised groups' difficulties (participatory research); the aggregation of intermediary entities (such as agencies, activist groups, and organisations) to plan and make social transformation a reality (community partnerships); the access to, and dissemination of, information (public information networks) in order to support all targets to identify and take advantage of available services; and the teaching and outreach functions activated to improve democratic processes and foster the achievement of civic skills. All these dimensions help reduce the distance between experts (scholars) and the public (practitioners in the community) in order to reach a "practice-relevant understanding of knowledge." (Lederach and Lopez, 2016, p. 3).

As underlined by Rice (2016), the essay by Boyer was prescient of the urgent need for democracy and a transformative process that attends to social inequalities and empowers inclusion.

3. Partnership in high-impact practices: a boost for innovation and inclusion

As a primary goal, higher education's mandate includes a constant dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure and promote social innovation and inclusion (*third mission*). This means that new directions and opportunities of action need to be identified to reinforce such relationships (the university and its environmental constituencies) and, among them, measures of co-ordination and accountability (Jongbloed et al., 2008).

In order to assume a service function, and take part in the process of social change in the teaching and research procedures in terms of their design and implementation, objectives (short and long term) need to be set whose performances are connected to the social issues faced by society at large (e.g.

poverty, gender inequalities), but also by the urban/rural local community (e.g. immigration and racism).

The inner university mechanism to find strategies to deal with these imperatives is not just a matter of institutional governance (e.g. having stakeholders in decision-making bodies), and cannot understate the impact of the choices made at the level of autonomy of every scholar or single course of study that involves the management of the teaching-learning process and the directions and methodologies of the research activity.

A boost towards the application of so called "engaged" learning opportunities for students, and the interdisciplinary and non-hierarchical nature of research by scholars and practitioners in the field, may be drivers of innovation. These are at the basis of the commonly known high-impact practices (HIPs).

As reported by Kuh and colleagues (2017) the phrase "high impact practices" was originally used in the introductory section of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) annual report (2006). It was repeated soon after by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, and was subsequently widely encouraged in the following years to refer to the promotion of student engagement in "educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development" (p. 2).

HIPs can include pedagogies of service-learning, but also investigatory approaches like community-based participatory research. The next section will address the core concepts of service learning and research from the perspective of the following open questions: what expectations may students develop regarding their current and future responsibilities to society? How can a mutually beneficial exchange between universities and the environment take place? How can a reliable relation of interconnection and interdependence be built among communities, scholars, practitioners, and stakeholders?

Service-learning

Service-learning can be defined as a challenge for both students and teachers. It is the space–time of the teaching-learning process where real-life dilemmas are not just presented or described to nurture student knowledge, but where real life calls for action. This means the opportunity to reach a full understanding of what social responsibility and civic competencies are. Since the construct was formalised (Sigmon, 1979) there have been several attempts to develop research in all involved dimensions, in order to form a pedagogical and didactical perspective with studies on instructional design and efforts in research to gather evidence-based data on its effectiveness. Service-learning is a training experience with a systemic connotation:

> "Service-learning is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility." (Bringle et al., 2006, p. 12).

Instructional activities, which fall under the umbrella term "service-learning", can vary according to their formal organisation in the course of study (undergraduate or graduate) either as workshop or curricular courses, or co-curricular activities. Such learning experiences can engage students by requiring a more direct hands-on contact with the field, but they can also have an indirect format by focussing on advocacy (e.g. by providing assistance at a distance).

The common aim of such experiences is to reflect on the process of acquiring a transformative attitude for personal and social growth; critical thinking, decision making, and cooperative skills need to be framed in authentic tasks (in response to genuine community needs) whose outcomes should be put at the service of the community.

Exposing students to tricky and often complex social realities implies the need to live a potentially emotional experience that may lead, if managed with the proper maturity and responsibility, to the development of enhanced empathy (Felten and Clayton, 2011; Hawkins and Kaplan, 2016). Being engaged in communities where, for example, a sub-culture is characterised by elements of social exclusion, requires a deep analysis of the context, participant observation, and the activation of socially transformative actions, run in strict partnership with the community itself. Participant observation is where students reappropriate their "purpose" as students, and play the transitional role of practitioners in the field; this is where they need to show their decentring abilities and a professional posture. Decentring lets students engage in alternative perspectives, that is, the understanding of how others perceive the world, recognising that they may have life expectations, motivations, and approaches different from one's own. This is a high-level skill, when it can be extended to academic performances of analysis and decision making by taking into account many aspects of a situation, problem, or a target community involved.

Effectiveness of service-learning practices with university students is well reported in the rich literature of the field (Celio et al., 2011; Goff et al., 2020; Hawkins and Kaplan, 2016), which shows a comprehensive set of analyses (including meta-analysis and qualitative studies) in terms of students' civic engagement, social skills development and team-building capacity, the

improvement of their attitudes towards inclusion and transformative strategies, as well as a generally qualitative impact on academic achievement.

Practices of active engagement with the partnership between the university context and the environment can enhance the impact on all involved actors when a reflective dimension is fostered. The application of such practices activate dynamic processes, and become increasingly relevant to the set of tools of self-reflection and collective brainstorming during the activity, and not just at its conclusion. The reflective component, moreover, may be seen from the perspective that the roles "can play in developing attitudes of inclusiveness" (Lavery et al., 2018, p.xviii). One can reflect, for example, about one's own attitudinal change towards people or groups beyond one's usual social reach (e.g. people with disabilities, the elderly, immigrants, refugees, etc.). This can deepen awareness about ethical and social issues and the enhancement of the purpose for transformative actions. The change at personal and professional level is, in fact, a premise for the potential changes at the level of social facets.

The innovative aspect related to the design and management of instructional approaches based on active pedagogies, like service-learning, is strictly connected to the need to develop faculty development programmes (Bringle and Hatcher, 2009) to ensure its successful integration in curricular or co-curricular courses and initiatives.

Community-based participatory research

For scholars, partnership with the community actors and their diverse culture and environments implies a number of challenges in terms of research design and management. The first challenge is "avoiding 'colonial' relationships with research participants" (Fawcett, 1991, p. 623), and this issue is strictly connected with the quality of communication flow between the parties.

Van de Ven (Kenworthy-U'Ren et al., 2005) explains the crucial node for community-based participatory research and the need for a broader and deeper communication between scholars and practitioners, by stating Boyer's point that "many of us in higher education have become increasingly insular in the ways we define and study our problems, based on limited interactions with people other than ourselves." (*ivi*, p. 356).

Community-based participatory research overcomes the risk of being closed to outside influence by involving the community (e.g. civic agencies, non-profits, etc.) in the research process. This ensures replying to research questions that can satisfy the community needs, widening the field of potential data sources, and increasing the impact of results (Barker, 2004, p. 126).

Employing methodologies that aim at knowledge co-production means treating communities as full partners rather than as a mere target of knowledge

transfer, but this shift can evoke resistance from researcher who are used, in their own academic context, to be in control of the whole process, from research questions to dissemination of the results. But, if the goal of research is to serve the community, we cannot avoid considering that "when participants have limited control over research goals and procedures, they receive fewer benefits from the studies than do researchers or the discipline in general." (Fawcett, 1991, p. 624).

This new perspective, that overturns a model of researcher-dominated relationships, can encounter issues at both the scientific, organisational, and methodological level (e.g. cultural differences in approaching the problems) before reaching a mutually satisfying collaboration (Cox, 2000; Fogel and Cook, 2006).

Dissemination of the research outcomes is an ethical responsibility, so community-based research gives the opportunity to provide different formats for the communication of both collected data and results of analysis. These formats should go beyond scientific publication, which are generally dedicated to highly-qualified audiences who access research through academic journals, conferences, and scientific initiatives that are normally attended by a constituency of subject-matter scholars.

Systems of direct communication (e.g. in public speaking sessions at the local level) or broad-based dissemination (e.g. via media) need to take into account the literacies and cultural differences of the addressees. Inappropriate communication can affect understanding and, consequently, generate barriers that prevent a process of sustaining social change (McDavitt et al*.,* 2016). However, communication flow should not be seen as exclusively travelling from researchers to community: relevant actors (participants, stakeholders, policy makers, etc.) should be given the chance to provide their feedback on results and their potential value, and provide their perspective on the way those results can play a role for meaningful change:

> "The values guiding how to communicate the results of research and action efforts and judge their impact reflect ideas for combining science and advocacy […], the ethics of social intervention […], and evolving models of prevention […] and empowerment […]. Work consistent with these values will enhance understanding of the phenomena by members of the community, the discipline, and decision makers. It can also increase the impact of the endeavor by extending local capacities for improvement and fitting small wins into a larger strategy of planned change" (Fawcett, 1991, p.631).

In what way can community-based participatory research have a cutting-edge impact? The participatory research design needs to anchor evaluative benchmarks in a theoretical framework of community change.

It can employ diverse approaches, methodologies, and methods (Cargo and Mercer, 2008) to translating knowledge into action in the effort to change the causes and circumstances (cultural barriers and stereotypes, infrastructures, literacy, etc.) that create inequalities in society. The innovative implication of this kind of research design lies in the shift from the researcher-dominant paradigm to a community-directed process that ensures that the partnership develops around community strengths and weaknesses – the ones, for example, of marginalised and underserved populations. This is what can be called a democratic ideal that "emphasizes the unique strengths, complementary expertise, and shared responsibilities of academic and nonacademic partners who are engaged in a joint process to which each contributes equally" (Cargo and Mercer, 2008, p. 332).

Finally, some core principles highlighted by the literature in the field of community-based participatory research (Cox, 2000; Fogel and Cook, 2006; Lederach and Lopez, 2016; Wallerstein and Duran, 2003) can be summarised in the following concepts: reciprocity (no parties excluded from the research process), shared, but suitable responsibilities (in respect of specific knowledge and expertise, skills, and resources), open decision-making environments, and flexible protocols.

4. Conclusions

Boyer's (1996) request is for that of community engagement, where scholarship, under a new epistemological approach (Rice, 2016), calls for a different relationship with the external world, and this is a connection which is reified in the concept of a community-based discourse. The basis of the partnership exists in the permeability of the university in embracing a communication process based on reciprocity and the collaboration with the territory in knowledge production, research generation, and experimentation.

One of the university mandates as a third mission is to achieve sustainable development through innovative didactical strategies and research activity, as well as through community outreach and inclusion. From this perspective, students can acquire knowledge, skills, and purposeful approaches to becoming contributory global citizens (Goff et al., 2020) thanks to service-learning opportunities embedded at different levels (curricular and/or co-curricular) within their degree courses. However, such opportunities can become a worthwhile learning experience when integrated into an iterative process at a systemic level; that is, when all interested actors (teachers, students, practitioners, stakeholders, and other community participants) contribute to the

reflection, and foster new reflective practices with their different roles and culture.

As "How a university (or indeed its many constituent parts) proceeds to identify, prioritise and engage with its communities reflects the evolution of the university" (Jongbloed et al*.,* 2008, p.304), faculty development programmes should be designed in order to reach the culture of a constructive integration of the larger community into the concept of scholarship.

Faculty development is a key element to enable teaching and research initiatives to open up spaces of trust between university and the community to activate multiple participatory and inclusive practices for social change.

Finally, an increasing field of research is related to institutional reward policies (Saltmarsh et al., 2009, p.34), and specifically "policies that reward community engagement across faculty roles so that research activity will be integrated with teaching and service as seamlessly connected scholarly activity". Creating an academic culture in which community-engaged scholarship is recognised and rewarded is a complex challenge, implying quality criteria, and among them, ones that address knowledge production, communication, and legitimation.

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