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# A Guidebook for Hope

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## A Guidebook for Hope

### *Book Review: Reframing Community Engagement in Higher Education*

Klaw, E., Tully, A., & Ikeda, E. K. (Eds.). (2023). *Reframing Community Engagement in Higher Education*. Routledge. ISBN: 9781032581705

Reviewed by Zoë Sullivan

#### Abstract

This review of *Reframing Community Engagement in Higher Education*, edited by Elena Klaw, Andrea Tully, and Elaine K. Ikeda, explores the book's emphasis on community engagement as a transformative tool in higher education. With diverse contributions, the book provides frameworks, strategies, and practical tools for educators to incorporate civic engagement, critical thinking, and social responsibility into academic settings. It highlights the role of community engagement in addressing societal challenges, fostering civic identity, and promoting inclusivity across institutions. Invoking a Freire-inspired pedagogy centered on hope, freedom, and action, this volume emerges as a vital guide for Community Engagement Professionals (CEPs) and aims to create meaningful, socially responsive educational experiences. While the review notes areas for improvement, including the need for additional perspectives from community partners and graduate students, it underscores the book's importance as a comprehensive resource for anyone committed to advancing community-engaged learning within an increasingly polarized society.

**Keywords:** *community-engaged professional (CEP), civic engagement, community engagement, higher education institutions (HEIs), community-engaged learning (CEL)*

## Una guía para la esperanza

### *Revisión del libro: Replantando la vinculación comunitaria en la educación superior*

Klaw, E., Tully, A., & Ikeda, E. K. (Eds.). (2023). *Reframing Community Engagement in Higher Education*. Routledge. ISBN: 9781032581705

Revisado por Zoë Sullivan

#### Resumen

Esta revisión de *Replantando la vinculación comunitaria en la educación superior*, editada por Elena Klaw, Andrea Tully y Elaine K. Ikeda, explora el énfasis del libro en la vinculación comunitaria como una herramienta transformadora en la educación superior. Con diversas contribuciones, el libro proporciona marcos conceptuales, estrategias y herramientas prácticas para que educadores incorporen el compromiso cívico, el pensamiento crítico y la responsabilidad social en entornos académicos. Destaca el rol de la vinculación comunitaria para abordar los desafíos sociales, fomentando la identidad cívica y promoviendo la inclusión en todas las instituciones. Usando una pedagogía inspirada en Freire y centrada en la esperanza, la libertad y la acción, este volumen surge como una guía esencial para los profesionales de vinculación comunitaria (CEP) por sus siglas en inglés y tiene como objetivo crear experiencias educativas significativas conectadas al ámbito social. Si bien esta revisión señala áreas de mejora, como la necesidad de incluir perspectivas adicionales de socios comunitarios y estudiantes de posgrado, subraya la importancia del libro como un recurso integral para cualquier persona comprometida con el avance del aprendizaje basado en la vinculación comunitaria dentro de una sociedad cada vez más polarizada.

**Palabras clave:** *profesional comprometido con la comunidad (CEP)\*, compromiso cívico, vinculación comunitaria, instituciones de educación superior (IES), aprendizaje basado en la vinculación con la comunidad (CEL)\**

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In recent decades, Community Engagement (CE) has emerged as a pivotal field within higher education globally. Modern CE is more than a catchall term for generic volunteering or service activities. It has evolved into a distinct field and movement that emphasizes collaborative and meaningful partnerships between institutions and communities, aiming to address societal challenges through shared knowledge and resources (Saltmarsh, 2017). This evolution reflects a shift from traditional educational paradigms, where universities primarily focused on teaching and research, to a more integrated approach that values civic responsibility and the co-production of knowledge as essential components of the academic mission (Post et al., 2016; Putnam, 1993). Community Engagement is now recognized as a vital mechanism for fostering social change, enhancing student learning, and promoting institutional accountability, thereby enriching both the educational experience and community well-being (Post et al., 2016). This shift has been accompanied by an expansion of scholarship aimed at articulating theory and identifying best practices to enhance our understanding of CE's multifaceted nature, its potential, and its profound impact on students, faculty, administration, staff, and community partners (Post et al., 2016).

One important aspect of this evolution is a recognition of the potential of CE to cultivate a sense of civic duty and responsibility among students and other stakeholders, as it fosters active participation in addressing societal challenges through collaborative partnerships with communities (Dean et al., 2020; Mittal, 2023). In *Reframing Community Engagement in Higher Education*, editors Elena Klaw, Andrea Tully, and Elaine K. Ikeda posit that in a time characterized by escalating social, political, economic, and environmental challenges, Community Engagement plays a crucial role in improving students' educational experiences while fostering their civic awareness. This approach is especially important in periods of intense societal division, as it can help cultivate community and solidarity. Moreover, community-engaged practices can equip not just students but also faculty, staff, and partners, with the tools needed to think critically about and work together to address the high-stakes issues of our time (Hawes et al., 2021; Selingo, 2021). By presenting chapters authored by community-engaged practitioners and professionals from diverse educational and nonprofit settings, the book offers valuable insights into the real-world challenges of implementing civic-minded community engagement initiatives from a variety of perspectives and institutional settings. It provides practical templates, guides, and exercises aimed at fostering deeper and more ethical critical community engagement practices within higher education (Lardier et al., 2021). The editors' goal for the book is to help others with the Freirean concept of "implementing and instituting a pedagogy of hope, freedom, and action" (Klaw, Tully, et al., 2023, p. 239), primarily by using community engagement as a vehicle for re-centering civic responsibility within higher education. The book suggests that such civically minded work may serve as the antidote to the division and isolation prevalent in contemporary society.

The book not only contributes to the discourse on best practices for meaningful community engagement within higher education but also serves as a vital resource for educators and practitioners seeking to navigate the complexities of fostering civic engagement in today's challenging landscape. In doing so, it provides frameworks and strategies that offer hope for a more united future, equipping institutions of higher education to use community engagement to foster a strong sense of civic responsibility in students, preparing them to become active, civically engaged citizens capable of addressing today's complex challenges. This book review will highlight the key insights of this text and discuss its strengths and potential areas for improvement.

## Summary of Chapters

The book opens with a foreword by David M. Donahue that describes the work as “challenge[ing] how we look at the world and provide[ing] insight into how and what we might see in community engagement with new perspectives” (Klaw, Tully et al., 2023, p.xii). This proves true as the book progresses, by providing new insights and practical applications from a variety of different personal and institutional perspectives. The book works to challenge readers—both those very experienced with community engagement in higher education and those new to the field—with reconsidering how their own lived experiences, education, and perspectives shape how they understand community engagement and its possibilities. Moreover, it provides the reader with a multiplicity of vantage points they may not have considered, to present new potential visions for what community engagement can be.

In Chapter 1, Klaw, Tully, and Ikeda address common assumptions about and challenges inherent to community-engaged learning (CEL), such as recognizing the foundational nature of course-based curricular service learning within CEL as well as the burgeoning multiplicity of approaches and strategies that are working to strengthen traditional CEL models and extend beyond them (Klaw, Tully et al., 2023). As the introduction makes clear, the editors’ goal is to reframe CEL by emphasizing relationship-centered changemaking in higher education institutions (HEIs) and by promoting service-learning and community engagement as a way to achieve students’ academic and life skills. Most crucially, they point out that service-learning is most impactful when it links civic learning to community development. In this time of varied social, economic, political, and climate crises, they argue that CEPs cannot continue with the status quo; instead, we must use these hard times as an inflection point of learning and change, developing community engagement approaches that “address worsening inequities, divisiveness, and an overall sense of outrage about the status quo” (Klaw, Tully et al., 2023, p. 14).

Part One, *Enacting Social Justice: Current Contexts and Community Engagement*, presents chapters that challenge the reader to consider new perspectives on both what community engagement is within higher education and what community engagement can be. In Chapter 2, “Community Engagement Strategies for Responding to Sociopolitical and Racial Challenges Facing American Society and Higher Education,” Bowen, Berrien, and Bennett offer strategies for responding to common challenges in community engagement and discuss how they may serve as the basis for “effective measures that move institutions well beyond platitudes and rhetoric regarding racism, exclusion and injustice” (Bowen et al., 2023, p. 12). The chapter begins by assessing new efforts to address and include Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) throughout higher education in meaningful ways within the current context of racial violence and social injustice. The authors describe numerous strategies, including diversity trainings, anti-racism imperatives, and actions focused on truth-telling, racial healing, and reparations, as well as a variety of community engagement strategies, such as discussions of books and films, public forums for dialogue, scholarship programs, workshops, and “Awkward Dinners.” These efforts can leverage community engagement and CEL to confront structural racism and inequality and promote the inclusion of diverse perspectives in such a way that benefits the institution of higher education, students, and the community at large (Bowen et al., 2023, p.24).

In Chapter 3, “Mapping Our Capacities to Facilitate Change: Applying the Ecosystem of Critical Feminist Praxis for Community Engagement Professionals,” author Star Plaxton-Moore urges community engagement professionals at all levels to “believe that community engagement can guide our institutions to authentically enact the public purpose of higher education while also advancing social justice outcomes from multiple constituencies” (Plaxton-Moore, 2023, p. 31). Plaxton-Moore presents a framework for community-engaged professionals (CEPs) for developing a “critical feminist approach” that can be leveraged to enact “positive institutional and systems change” at all levels of community-engaged work (ibid., p. 33). The author presents a framework developed from interviews with CEPs and a synthesis of critical feminist theory (ibid., p. 31). The model uses ecological metaphors to present CEPs standing on the “fertile grounds” of their experiences, enveloped “in the air” of the context within which they work, and energized by the “source of light and heat” of their higher education institution. At the model’s core lies “embodied praxis,” a combination of one’s values, reflection, power analysis, and action from which CEPs

nurture the “tendrils of change” across all levels of their work (ibid., p. 47). Plaxton Moore concludes the chapter with suggestions for how CEPs can use this model as a foundation for reflections and discussions that apply feminist principles to evaluate and understand their work, as well as providing a worksheet for a reflection activity for CEPs based on this model.

In Chapter 4, “Reclaiming the Mission of the Community College: Civic, Community, and Political Equity Reimagined,” Patricia D. Robinson and Verdis LeVar Robinson—CEPs working within the community college context—highlight the centrality and potential of American community colleges as centers of civic engagement. As the authors so eloquently state, “community college students are the face of America today and they represent the voice of America tomorrow” (Robinson & LeVar Robinson, 2023, p. 60). Community colleges are unique in serving local residents who grapple firsthand with the social, cultural, and economic inequities that face the community and who already hold strong ties to community partners. Since community college students are particularly motivated to address local issues that directly affect them, using place-based and project-based learning can be especially effective. CEL can empower some of the nation’s most vulnerable students to become active and engaged citizens who have the experience and tools needed to solve real-world problems. Moreover, the authors emphasize that community colleges are uniquely positioned to fulfill their original mission as “Democracy’s Colleges,” aligning with the 1947 President’s Commission’s recommendation that higher education should serve as a steward and promoter of democratic “values, ideals, and processes” (Robinson & LeVar Robinson, 2023, p. 61). This chapter provides unique insights into the inherent advantages that community colleges have to promote civic engagement through community engagement, adding nuance to the book’s overall focus on CE in HEIs.

Chapter 5, “Social Media and Youth Climate Activism: Community-Engaged Learning for the 2020s” by Ellen Middaugh, Mark Felton, and Henry Fan, provides a unique toolkit for helping “youth to develop the capacities needed to build a better online public sphere” (Middaugh et al., 2023, p. 77). The authors present a hands-on, activity-based model for “online civic inquiry, discourse and action” that serves as the basis for a course about new strategies for critically engaging with social media and using it as a potential force for change in civic life (ibid., p. 77). The authors discuss their work and its origins and then walk readers through the model, using a unit structured around social media and climate action as an example. Several appendices provide resources and tools for instructors to adapt the model effectively within their own disciplines.

In Part 2, *Building a Movement: Establishing Infrastructure for Community Engagement*, the chapters focus on employing the power of coalition-building throughout and across institutions of higher education to harness collective power as a means for transformational change and increased civic engagement. In Chapter 6, Elaine K. Ikeda asserts that HEIs have a responsibility to prepare students to “be active and knowledgeable participants in our democracy” and invokes John Dewey’s call for education to serve as the “midwife” for democracy (Ikeda, 2023, p. 101). Community-engaged work in higher education often feels confined within individual institutions, but this chapter identifies essential strategies for building vibrant, community-oriented institutions that can collaborate beyond their boundaries, fostering shared goals and collective movements. It emphasizes the importance of building coalitions both within and across institutions and with external communities, offering strategies to maximize the positive impact of these collaborations for all stakeholders involved. Drawing on 20+ years of experience working to build coalitions in higher education, Ikeda provides questions and strategies for an institution to consider in building and leveraging successful coalitions.

Chapter 7, “And So Goes the Nation: California Gets to Work” by Josh Fryday, Elena Klaw, and Andrea Tully, provides further support for the power of coalition building across community-engaged higher education institutions (Fryday et al., 2023). This chapter focuses on the creation and implementation of the Californians for All College Corps program, a groundbreaking collaboration between AmeriCorps and California Volunteers that gets students and citizens involved in meeting the most pressing needs of the state through civic action and community engagement. The chapter provides a detailed blueprint of the program, focusing on strategies and lessons learned that enable its adaptation in other contexts. It highlights common challenges faced by fellows, including balancing competing priorities and managing shifting

expectations during the year-long fellowship, as well as successful strategies, such as offering sufficient living allowances and education awards, which are critical in enabling participation from fellows with diverse backgrounds. Another significant lesson emerged from participants during the COVID-19 pandemic: community engagement component served as a vital tool to counter isolation, feelings of despair, and powerlessness brought on by the pandemic. By emphasizing these strategies and insights, the chapter serves as a valuable resource for replicating and tailoring the program in varying settings.

Chapter 8, “A Presidential Perspective: Place-Based Community Engagement in Faith-Based Higher Education” by Erica K. Yamamura, Kent Koth, and Chris Nayve, presents the unique perspective of faith-based institutions of higher education and their unique position among community-engaged colleges and universities (Yamamura et al., 2023). The religious principles that guide faith-based higher education institutions often emphasize community service as a core value, making those institutions particularly supportive of place-based community engagement. This commitment becomes especially strong during times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as many faith traditions prioritize caring for the community and protecting its most vulnerable members as fundamental aspects of their belief systems. This chapter is based on data collected from interviews with two college presidents at faith-based higher education institutions, and reveals key lessons learned about effective community engagement within this context during several crises occurring over the last few years.

Part 3, *Reconceptualizing Roles: Faculty, Staff and Partnerships in Community Engagement*, is focused on the different experiences of stakeholders across all levels of community engagement work in higher education. In Chapter 9, “Community Engagement Professionals and Transformative Education,” Tully et al.’s thematic analysis focuses on equipping the next generation of Community Engagement Practitioners (CEPs) with the skills and insights needed to meet evolving expectations within the field (2023). Their analysis provides insight into the motivations, experiences, identities, and contexts of CEPs and identifies key factors—such as strong mentorship and reflective practice—that are invaluable to CEPs’ work and central to their ability to affect change at their institutions.

In Chapter 10, “The Tensions and Rewards of Community Engagement for Faculty Members,” Klaw, Ngo et al. represent diverse, community-engaged faculty working at different levels across various types of institutions. They offer personal stories to highlight their experiences and the trajectories of their careers and share lessons learned and adaptable strategies for readers to “develop, support, implement, sustain and institutionalize transformational community engagement within the academic enterprise” (Klaw, Ngo, et al., 2023, p. 181; Saltmarsh, 2017) (P. 181).

Chapter 11, “Community-Engaged Partnerships When Healthy Relationships are the Priority” by Jamilah Ducar and Daren Ellerbee, highlights how the Office of Engagement and Community Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) strategically supports community-engaged learning and partnerships (Ducar & Ellerbee, 2023). This chapter is unique in its central focus on ethical community engagement so that true collaboration and partnership are at the core of community-engaged scholarship and work. This chapter highlights a set of community-identified priorities for Pitt faculty, staff, and students who seek to partner with residents and organizations of the Homewood community local to the University of Pittsburgh. This framework serves as an excellent starting point that can be adapted by other community-engaged programs.

Chapter 12 features Shandela Contreras’s poignant poem, “Ode to Education That Lifts Us Higher.” The poem captures the promise of college for students from diverse backgrounds, including first-generation college students, immigrant students, and those from varying economic circumstances. It emphasizes what community and community engagement means in this context, highlighting the power of CE programs like the California College Corps to expand access to higher education. Through its reflection on education’s potential to uplift individuals and communities, the poem underscores the profound impact of fostering opportunity and belonging within higher education (Contreras, 2023).

In Conclusion, the editors reflect on the unique challenges confronting community engagement and higher education amid global upheaval and unrest. Rather than merely restating the benefits of community engagement, they issue a powerful challenge to educators: to resist apathy and exhaustion in the face of injustice, corruption, greed, and extremism. They pose the question, “How do we, as

educators, continue to act in the face of the forces of injustice, domination, political corruption, greed, and extremism?” (Klaw, Tully, et al., 2023, p. 238). Their answer is resolute: “We act because we have no choice . . . we persist because our students, our community, and our democracy are counting on us” (*ibid.*). The book concludes by emphasizing the potential of CE to foster reconnection and rebuild civic identity and community. It urges readers to draw on Freire’s pedagogy of hope, freedom, and action to inspire and sustain this critical work.

## Discussion

*Reframing Community Engagement in Higher Education* showcases how community engagement can be a transformative tool for fostering civic responsibility, promoting social justice, and driving systemic change. The book positions itself as a guidebook for CEPs at all levels, offering frameworks and strategies to strengthen a fractured society by reclaiming the civic mission and purpose of higher education. This aligns with the scholarly literature, underscoring the role of CE in cultivating critical thinking, civic identity, and active participation in democratic processes at the individual level (Annette, 2005; Mitchell, 2008; Saltmarsh, 2017). The book advances the field by including diverse frameworks for addressing systemic issues, building on scholarship that emphasizes the importance of feminist and anti-racist approaches in CE for promoting social change (Crabtree, 2013; Mitchell, 2008). Additionally, it emphasizes the expansive potential of coalition-building within and across community-engaged institutions and their stakeholders, adding to the literature that highlights the importance and potential of CE between institutions, communities, and governments to address systemic inequities (Dostilio, 2017; Post et al., 2016; Soska & Butterfield, 2013). Together, these contributions reimagine higher education as a platform for cultivating resilience, solidarity, and impact in society.

The book’s greatest strengths lie in the range of CEP viewpoints presented, emphasizing how diverse identities and schools of thought inform best practices in community engagement. Through testimonials from multiple stakeholders, it distills valuable lessons and approaches for CEPs. Moreover, it provides evidence from and strategies for under-represented institutional contexts, such as community colleges and faith-based institutions. Perhaps its greatest strength is the wealth of practical applications on offer; most chapters provide questions or exercises for conversation, appendices filled with great resources, and practical how-tos that can be adopted by readers and directly employed in their work. Two chapters that do this especially well are Star Plaxton-Moore’s “Ecosystem of Critical Feminist Praxis for Community Engagement Professionals,” which provides a model for CEPs to effect change on their campuses, and Middaugh, Felton, and Fan’s “Social Media and Youth Climate Activism,” that provides concise guidance and resources for replicating their course. Also of note is the focus on coalition building on campuses and across regional/ national contexts—an under-researched and -utilized aspect of community engagement, described in multiple chapters in Part 2. The authors in this section note the potential of coalition building for transformational change in community engagement and higher education.

The main weaknesses of this volume come from a surprising lack of input from two key stakeholders in community engagement at the higher education level: community partners and graduate students. While Ducar and Ellerbee’s chapter (“Community-Engaged Partnerships When Healthy Relationships are the Priority”) does stand out for spotlighting community voice via co-authorship with a community partner, it is the only chapter in the volume that directly includes a community partner’s point of view and that discusses best practices for ethical community engagement (Ducar & Ellerbee, 2023). Moreover, while capturing the testimonials and experiences of CEPs across varying levels of higher education, the voices of graduate students are absent. A focus on graduate student community engagement and how they help to reclaim higher education as a space to foster civic identity and reasonability would be a great addition to the volume.

## Conclusion

*Reframing Community Engagement in Higher Education* is a significant contribution to the SLCE literature, offering a beacon of hope for the future. It compellingly argues that community engagement can serve as a transformative tool for revitalizing civic responsibility and fostering social change. By empowering students and professionals to collaboratively address pressing societal issues, the book provides a roadmap for enacting meaningful change within academic institutions and beyond. Its hands-on approach and practical guidance make it an invaluable resource for CEPs seeking actionable steps to maximize the impact of their work. While the book excels in its comprehensive framework and actionable strategies, it could benefit from a more robust inclusion of perspectives from community partners, who are critical stakeholders in the community engagement process. Additionally, expanding the discussion to include graduate students would further enrich the narrative, highlighting their potential roles in driving the transformational change for which the book advocates.

Despite these areas for enhancement, the book ultimately delivers a vital message that I believe will resonate with those in the field: it provides hope as well as concrete steps for utilizing community-engaged learning as a powerful catalyst for strengthening civic engagement and promoting freedom in our increasingly polarized society. As we navigate the complexities of contemporary challenges, this book serves as a timely reminder of the potential inherent in community engagement. It encourages all stakeholders—students, faculty, administrators, and community partners—to come together, fostering a collective sense of responsibility and action. For anyone involved in the field of community engagement, this book is an essential read that inspires both reflection and action, making it a valuable addition to the literature on community-engaged scholarship.

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