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Jennifer W. Purcell
Kennesaw State University

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Book Advances Theory and Evidence-Driven Design and Redesign of Community Leadership Development Programs

**Review by Jennifer W. Purcell
Kennesaw State University**

K. Pigg, S. Gasteyer, G. Martin, G. Apaliya, and K Keatings, *Community Effects of Leadership Development Education: Citizen Empowerment for Civic Engagement*. Rural Studies Series, Vol. 3. Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2015, 240 pages. ISBN-10:1940425581.

This volume is the product of a five-year collaborative study on the impact of community leadership development programs spanning six states. The book is the third volume of the Rural Studies Series sponsored by the Rural Sociological Society, and the research presented was funded in part by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. The purpose of the book is to engender thoughtful theory and evidence-driven design and redesign of community leadership development programs.

Organization and Content

The book's nine chapters are organized into two parts. In Part I, the authors dedicate six chapters to the presentation of their analysis of data collected on community leadership development. In Chapter One, the authors provide a historical context of community leadership development (CLD). They define community-based programs as those that are (1) focused on community issues and needs; (2) organized and managed locally or by a community group; and (3) sponsored by local resources. Although CLD programs are diverse in their target audience, curriculum, delivery, and specific community-level outcomes, the authors contend the common element across programs is their goal to "increase local leaders' capacity to improve the community's well-being" (p. 21). The authors suggest investment in leadership development and capacity-building responds to observed deficits in the community. They contend current and future community leaders in smaller, rural communities have inadequate preparation to address the complexity of social factors impacting their communities. In closing Chapter One, the authors propose two significant reconsiderations for CLD. First, they suggest CLD program sponsors and practitioners examine evaluation

strategies for how program outcomes for individual participants, organizations, and communities are achieved. Identifying how CLD achieves outcomes at various levels is critical to evaluating and improving programs. Second, the authors call for a conceptualization of leadership that moves beyond individual roles and talents to one that recognizes the collaboration and interaction through which leadership and leaders manifest. This conceptual view of leadership as a social process informs the learning intervention that is CLD and is the premise on which the study is built.

Chapter Two details the impact of CLD on individual participants. The key finding related to individual participants informed by data collected in 24 communities with CLD programs, or "treatment sites," was respondents who participated in CLD programs had significant learning when compared to respondents who lived in counties without programs. CLD participation yields learning that is associated with measureable increased levels of civic engagement and enhanced social capital within communities. Chapter Three expands upon the impact of CLD on social capital by illustrating how involvement in community organizations is broadened and intensified among CLD participants. In Chapter Four, the authors utilize a modified application of Flora, Flora, and Fey's (2003) community capitals framework to demonstrate the positive impacts of CLD on community development.

Chapter Five addresses participant diversity, curriculum design, and community effects. The authors present data related to the six individual-level outcomes of CLD identified in the study (Personal Growth and Efficacy, Community Commitment, Shared Future and Purpose, Community Knowledge, Civic Engagement, and Social Cohesion). In Chapter Six, the authors press

the core idea of the book: community leadership is about community change (p. 119). Their intent is to reveal strategies for CLD program improvement through empirical evidence. Chapter Six concludes Part I with a series of questions for practitioners and sponsors to consider as they design or redesign CLD offerings.

Part II includes three chapters that address the implications of the research for practitioners and future research. In this section, the authors detail a conceptual framework for community leadership development that integrates existing literature and findings from their research. The authors first emphasize the individual motivations for developing community leadership capacities and the myriad expressions of civic engagement (Chapter Seven). The authors suggest civic engagement leverages individual capacities for leadership and builds upon networked, relational leadership within a community in order to influence positive change (Chapter Eight). Hence, developing individual leadership capacity is elemental to promoting civic engagement; however, such individual-level development is merely a first step in CLD.

As demonstrated through the study, effective CLD interventions include curriculum that addresses individual, organizational, and community-level outcomes. Absence of any one of the three curricular outcomes is a missed opportunity to influence change and impact the community. The authors conclude with a discussion of a model of CLD informed by their research through which participants first attain and/or demonstrate (1) improved human capital self-efficacy and governance skills, (2) increased community commitment, (3) shared future and purpose, and (4) increased political knowledge (political capital). Based on the model, CLD participants then demonstrate increased social cohesion and ability to bridge networks and increased civic engagement. These CLD participant behaviors then result in enhanced civic infrastructure and community capacity that yield community-level awareness of responsiveness to social needs and the inevitable changing conditions experienced in communities.

Audience

The book is tailored for CLD practitioners, sponsors, and evaluators through its accessible theoretical literature, study design, and data analysis. The volume is valuable for researchers who will be impressed with the breadth of relevant

citations and integration of multiple disciplinary literature bases. Additionally, the authors provide five sets of study questions throughout the text that would be helpful for structuring independent or group learning exercises for graduate students or as a means of professional development for community leadership development practitioners.

Conclusion

Community effects of leadership development education: Citizen empowerment for civic engagement is an essential read for anyone responsible for the design and evaluation of community leadership development programs. Although targeted program evaluations and assessment of participant learning exist, there is a dearth of empirical research on CLD effects on communities and the interplay between individual, organizational, and community-level outcomes. This much anticipated volume heralds a new era of scholarship and practice that engages interdisciplinary literature and empirical research to more critically and precisely explore the benefits of the vast investment in CLD. The authors are frank in their discussion of the research's limitations; the factors influencing CLD outcomes are numerable and controls are challenging. Despite the acknowledged limitations of the research, this volume is a significant contribution to CLD. The research presented provides an unprecedented synthesis of literature and empirically based insights into the recruitment practices, curriculum design, and evaluation strategies of CLD. Furthermore, the volume is a welcomed summons for scholars and practitioners to build upon the recommendations contained therein and advance the design of community leadership development programs and the ways in which such programs' outcomes and impacts are measured.

The volume will also appeal to community engagement practitioners and community-engaged scholars who support and participate in university-community partnerships. University-sponsored community engagement activities, including community-engaged scholarship, are championed for their positive impact on communities; however, comprehensive monitoring and measuring the varied impacts of these activities remains a challenge. Pigg and his colleagues challenge us to reconsider the design of programs intended to support leadership and community development. While the emphasis of their research addresses community leadership development specifically, there are implications for the diverse

array of university-community partnerships. For example, the authors address multiple program design elements: primary and secondary outcomes, sponsorship mobilization, collaborative learning, the political and value-laden nature of community-engaged efforts, and diversity among participants among others.

The text may also encourage university leaders to reflect on the ways in which academic, co-curricular, and outreach programs meet their communities' leadership development education needs. As representatives of anchor institutions that contribute to their communities' sustainability and advancement, university leaders must carefully consider how and to what extent myriad initiatives individually and collectively impact participants and communities. Through this rigorous investigation, universities may more holistically illustrate their significance and demonstrate appropriate stewardship of the vast public and private investment in higher education.

The authors provide substantial insight into the effects of community leadership development programs; however, even they acknowledge their contribution falls short in providing a general theory of community leadership. Pigg and his colleagues provide a model of the effects of community leadership development programs on individuals and communities that, although limited, presents a more comprehensive conceptual framework for leadership development education. Their model synthesizes multiple disciplinary literatures related to civic leadership capacity and demonstrates the interconnectivity and complexity of community leadership development. Community effects of leadership development education: Citizen empowerment for civic engagement is crucial addition to the literature on community leadership development, civic engagement, and community capacity building that will advance the influence of citizen leaders in their communities. The volume is also a valuable resource for university leaders who advocate for campus-community partnerships and those whose work directly impacts such collaborations that are designed to have positive impacts on communities.

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About the Reviewer

Jennifer W. Purcell is an assistant professor of Leadership Studies and faculty consultant for community engagement at Kennesaw State University.