

WHY COMMUNITY MATTERS: CONNECTING EDUCATION WITH CIVIC LIFE

BY NICHOLAS V. LONGO

A BOOK REVIEW

BY GRETCHEN RYMARCHYK

"AMERICAN DEMOCRACY IS AT RISK" P.1



DWINDLING RURAL ECONOMIES AND POPULATIONS, AND INCREASING POVERTY ARE RESULTING IN DECREASED CIVIC ENGAGEMENT. AMONG OTHER THINGS, THIS MEANS...

FEWER PEOPLE AT THE VOTING BOOTHS,



FEWER PEOPLE ACTIVE IN RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS, AND



FEWER PEOPLE JOINING CLUBS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS.





OUR ANSWERS TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS OFTEN RESULT IN TURNING TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO EDUCATE STUDENTS AS PART OR ALL OF THE SOLUTION. HOWEVER, SCHOOLS HAVE BEEN TEACHING CIVICS FOR A WHILE, YET WE ARE STILL SEEING COMMUNITY DECLINE IN RURAL AREAS.

IT'S TIME TO EXPAND OUR THINKING, LORNE



IN ORDER FOR COMMUNITIES TO THRIVE, THEIR CITIZENS NEED TO BE ACTIVE AND INVESTED!

SHOULDN'T TEACHING STUDENTS TO BE INVOLVED IN THE COMMUNITY... HAPPEN IN THE COMMUNITY?

I MEAN... LOOK AT HULL HOUSE!



WHAT STARTED OUT AS A VERY DIVERSE, OVERCROWDED AREA POPULATED BY POOR IMMIGRANTS, GREW INTO A THRIVING VILLAGE WITH DAY CARE, MUSEUMS, LIBRARIES, CITIZENSHIP CLASSES, CLUBS AND ACTIVITIES. THIS IN TURN, POWERED A REFORM MOVEMENT THAT INCLUDED LEGISLATION FOR LABOR PROTECTION, JUVENILE PROTECTION, AND A FEDERAL CHILD LABOR LAW. (1)

THE WAY THIS HAPPENED WAS BY TAKING EDUCATION INTO THE COMMUNITY, WITH A PHILOSOPHY THAT EVERYONE CAN TEACH SOMETHING. NEIGHBORS LEARNED FROM EACH OTHER, CREATING STRONG BONDS WITHIN AND ACROSS THE NEIGHBORHOOD.





THAT ALL SOUNDS NICE, BUT
DON'T YOU THINK YOU'RE A LITTLE
BIASED, JANE?

LET ME
FINISH,
LORNE...



HIGHLANDER
FOLK SCHOOL
TRAINED CITIZENS TO BE
LEADERS IN THEIR HOME
COMMUNITIES, INCLUDING
ROSA PARKS AND MARTIN
LUTHER KING JR, AMONG
OTHERS. LIKE HULL HOUSE,
THEY ALSO USE A PROCESS
THAT ALLOWS EVERYONE TO
LEARN FROM EVERYONE
ELSE.



AND!! THE NEIGHBORHOOD
LEARNING COMMUNITY IN ST.
PAUL, MN HAS UNIFIED A
PREVIOUSLY FRAGMENTED,
CONFLICT-LADEN NEIGHBORHOOD
WHO WANTED THE SCHOOLS TO DO
MORE. "A LEARNING COMMUNITY
CALLS ON EVERYONE EVERYWHERE IN
THE NEIGHBORHOOD TO SUPPORT
AN EDUCATIONAL
ENVIRONMENT" (2)



SO YOU SEE, LORNE, THE ANSWER TO COMMUNITY DETERIORATION AND DEMOCRATIC DISENGAGEMENT IS TO DEMOCRATIZE EDUCATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TRAINING BY SHARING COMMUNITY RESOURCES IN RADIALLY OPEN WAYS.

...YOU AND YOUR EDUCATION



THE BOOK GIVES IDEAS, EXAMPLES, AND INSPIRATION FOR **COMMUNITY-WIDE SUSTAINABLE BENEFITS** WITH A HEALTHY DOSE OF REALISM THAT THIS REQUIRES INTENTIONAL AND SIGNIFICANT SHIFTS IN PHILOSOPHY, PRACTICE, AND POWER.

THIS IS VERY ALIGNED WITH, AND EASY TO INCORPORATE INTO, THE **COMMUNITY SCHOOLS MODEL** THAT NY IS INVESTING IN RIGHT NOW.

I FOUND THIS BOOK TO BE INSPIRATIONAL AND COMPELLING, FOR MANY REASONS:

CONCEPTS ARE SUPPORTED BY OTHER RESEARCH

EVERY SCHOOL HAS A COMMUNITY OUTSIDE ITS WALLS

BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY GOES A LONG WAY IN THE VOTING BOOTH.

WE CANNOT SOLVE THESE ISSUES BY SEPARATING THEM INTO STERILE CATEGORIES DEVOID OF CONTEXT AND PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE.

GOOD EXAMPLES OF WIN-WIN OPPORTUNITIES TO ENRICH EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN, WHILE DEVELOPING INTEREST IN LOCAL PROJECTS AND ISSUES - LEADING TO IMMEDIATE AND LONG TERM CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

ABOUT THE AUTHOR...

NICHOLAS V. LONGO IS A PROFESSOR AT CENTRAL CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY. HE HAS A PHD IN EDUCATION, AND THERE IS A BRIEF AND RICH DESCRIPTION AT WWW.CCSU.EDU/COMMUNITYENGAGEMENT/LONGO.HTML

IN A NUTSHELL, HE IS AN EXPERT IN THE COMMUNITY- AND SERVICE LEARNING, LEADERSHIP AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT. HE IS WELL QUALIFIED TO WRITE THIS BOOK. HE GIVES A THOROUGH EXAMINATION OF THE HISTORY AND UNDERPINNINGS OF THE SOCIAL PROBLEMS CONTRIBUTING TO CIVIC DECLINE, AS WELL AS THE SOLUTIONS THAT HAVE WORKED IN THE PAST WITH COMMUNITIES WE THINK OF AS HAVING VERY LOW RESOURCES.