Creating Campus Community

In Search of Ernest Boyer's Legacy

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William M. McDonald
and Associates

With foreword and afterword
by Parker J. Palmer

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Foreword

Parker J. Palmer

It was . . . obvious to him . . . that there is far, far more that unifies all of us human beings than that separates us. Thus it was that his strongest impulse. . . was always to make connections. He took it as his daily task to form bridges. Bridges between ideas. Bridges between institutions. And most important of all, bridges between people.

From the eulogy by Ernest Boyer Jr. at his father's funeral

One of my few regrets is that I never had a chance to get to know Ernest Boyer Sr. especially well. I never sat with him on a committee, never worked with him on a project, never had a long and leisurely conversation with the man. And yet, like almost everyone else in higher education, I usually referred to him as Ernie, as if he were an old and good friend.

In his writing and speaking, Ernie Boyer had qualities that led his readers and listeners to regard him as a trusted companion. Obviously, he was intelligent, thoughtful, insightful, and well-read. More important, he was a person of plain speech, moral sensibility, spiritual openness, and practical wisdom. But, above all else, he was a graceful man—a man full of grace.

The writers brought together for this book explore Ernie Boyer's many contributions to the renewal of community in higher

education, and each writer, on his or her own campus, has sought to extend the Boyer legacy. They know, better than most, that cultivating community is a complex challenge in the midst of an academic culture infamous for its individualism, judgmentalism, and competitiveness. And they have much to teach us about how these obstacles can be overcome.

But before we get too entangled in those complexities, I want to name a simple truth: Ernie Boyer's contribution to the renewal of community in higher education is found not only in his thinking, his writing, his speaking, and his projects. It is also found in his personal embodiment of grace.

While Ernie Boyer was among us—with his integrity, his compassion, and his commitment—the academy felt a bit more like a community to all who knew him or knew of him. We had in him a formidable advocate for those fundamental human virtues that make community possible. He respected us and we respected him. He trusted us and we trusted him. He loved us and we loved him. Though he is no longer with us, these qualities of selfhood continue to do their work. No one who saw them embodied in Ernie Boyer can deny their possibility or their power, despite the fact that academic culture sometimes seems to scorn such elemental virtues.

The simple truth about community is that it gathers around such personal virtues shared and multiplied. That truth becomes more pointed when we turn it around: community cannot, and will not, gather around smallness of mind, tightness of heart, banality of spirit, frenzy masquerading as efficiency, myopic views of reality, faddish techno-babble, obsession with the bottom line, or the fear that is masked by arrogance in too many intellectuals' lives.

In the absence of personal grace, it matters not how many programs we create to "build community," how many trained facilitators or tested group processes or state-of-the-art workshops we budget for and buy. Every community-building project reported in this book, I wager, owes its ultimate success not to strategies and tactics but to the qualities of selfhood manifest in the leaders of

those projects. Human identity and integrity are the strange attractors of community, and when those qualities are not available among us, you can kiss community good-bye.

It may sound like I am headed toward a pious counsel of perfection here: Show me good people, like Ernie Boyer, and I will show you community. But that is not where I am going with this. I want instead to pursue a critical question: Is it possible, in higher education, to create conditions that can help all of us grow our own identity and integrity, to become strange attractors of community, each in his or her own way?

In asking this question—let alone trying to answer it—I swim upstream against a widely held (although often unconscious) conviction that while it is possible to "grow" the store of knowledge we hold and the skill with which we use it, it is not possible to grow the human soul. Or, if it is possible, "soul work" is out of place in higher education and should be left to the family, the therapist, or the religious community.

But I believe that soul work, rightly understood, is higher education's proper domain, and if we fail to make room for it, we fail to educate in any meaningful sense of the term. Indeed, I believe that all education is a process of forming or deforming the human soul—whether or not we understand, acknowledge, or embrace that fact. The only question is whether we will be thoughtful about that process and try to direct it toward the best possible ends.

My case was recently made in an unexpected place: the newsletter of Phi Beta Kappa, an honorary society better known as an advocate of pure intellect than as a friend to the things of the soul. In the Autumn 2000 issue of *Key Reporter,* Leroy S. Rouner, professor of philosophy and religion at Boston University, wrote:

> The best thing ever written on the philosophy of education is Plato's *Protagoras,* in which one of these Athenian rich kids wants to study with Protagoras, a Sophist, an ethical relativist who will teach the kid how to make

> a good speech without knowing what justice or whatever really means. The young man, one Hippocrates, asks Socrates to make the arrangement for him. But Socrates asks him the crucial question about education, and that is, "If you study with this fellow, what will he make of you?" This is not a question that most college deans' offices like to talk about in this *post in loco parentis* era. Still, the fact is that a college education feeds an adolescent in one end and gets a young adult out the other. In the process of those four years that person has changed significantly, and you and I have been agents of that change.
>
> We say, "Hey, listen, I just teach history. I'm not their mother or their priest or their shrink." That's true. A college is not a family or a church or a hospital. Still, what happens, in the course of what we do, is soul making.

To prove Professor Rouner's claim, all we need to do is recall the professors who have influenced the formation of our own souls, for better or for worse. But I believe that we can and must extend his thesis beyond the relations of individual teachers to individual students and reflect on the formative, or deformative, power of academic culture itself.

That culture has been dominated by a theory of knowing that has too often deformed the souls of educated people. Sometimes called objectivism, this theory asserts that to know anything truly and well, the knower must remain at a distance from the known. According to objectivism, human subjectivity—the domain of the soul—is a vast sinkhole of shadow, bias, prejudice, ignorance, and error that must be kept apart from "the known." Whether the object of knowledge is a natural phenomenon, a period of history, some form of human behavior, or a literary text, the knower who draws too close to it runs the risk of tainting its purity with his or her subjective distortions.

This theory of knowing has been translated into a pedagogy whose main motif is "distance"—keeping teachers at a distance from their students, students at a distance from each other, and teachers and students alike at a distance from the object of their study. The result has too often been an "educated" person who has a lot of knowledge about the world but little or no sense of personal connection with the world that knowledge points to. Objectivism sets the knower apart from the known, thus setting the actor apart from the world he or she inhabits, creating what might fairly be call "educated amorality." Because the human self is inherently relational—created in, through, and for community—the distancing motif of objectivism too often leads to the deformation of the human soul.

Exactly what forces formed Ernie Boyer's soul is, to say the obvious, beyond my knowing. His character, like yours and mine, was crafted by many forces, a process ultimately shrouded in mystery. And even if I knew how to clone Ernie Boyer's nature, I would not want to do it; I love diversity too much to pursue such an Orwellian nightmare! But, knowing what I do about Ernie Boyer's biography, I dare say that his sensibilities were shaped in part by his education—an education in which distance is overcome by connectedness, in which learners are brought into relationship to, and responsibility for, the world that their knowledge is about.

One name for this kind of education is *liberal arts*. That ancient course of studies is so named, not because it is liberal in the ideological sense but because it aims at liberating us. Liberating us from what? From all external forms of tyranny, of course, and from internal tyrannies as well—especially from the aforementioned "smallness of mind, tightness of heart, banality of spirit, frenzy masquerading as efficiency, myopic views of reality, faddish technobabble, obsession with the bottom line, or the fear that is masked by arrogance in too many intellectuals' lives." Education should liberate us from the arrogance that we are either set apart from the world or perched above it all.

The aim of liberal education is to evoke from every person his or her unique version of the virtues we saw embodied in Ernie Boyer. It does so by focusing on the world, of course—the world of physical reality, of social exchange, of historical dynamics, of imagination and ideas. But we study these worlds through the lenses of the humanities and the social and physical sciences, not only to discover what is "out there" but also to discover what is "in here." Every discipline in the liberal arts, rightly understood, holds a mirror to our own condition, reflecting who we are as physical creatures, as social animals, as beings who think and feel and dream.

To separate "in here" from "out there" is to make a distinction without a difference, for the two are continually interacting to co-create what we fondly call reality. If I bring to the world an inner life riddled with arrogance, or envy, or fear, I help co-create individualism, judgmentalism, and moral indifference. But if I bring a different set of inner realities—humility, or openness, or faith, or fellow-feeling—I may help community to emerge among us. Liberal education is rooted in the time-tested Socratic dictum that "the unexamined life is not worth living." We can and should enlarge that dictum into a social principle with which I believe Socrates would agree: if you choose to live an unexamined life, you do not have the right to inflict it on other people!

When we understand the connections between inner and outer reality, and when we commit ourselves to educational soul work with the same skill and intentionality that we commit to budgets and policies and programs, we will find that it is possible to raise up more Ernie Boyers and fewer barbarians. We can start to reverse the situation that Professor Rouner describes when he writes in *Key Reporter:* "There are probably more genuinely brilliant people in American higher education today than there have ever been in the past. At the same time, there is probably less genuine human wisdom available than there was a generation or two ago" (*Key Reporter,* Autumn 2000, 66(1), p. 5).

As we examine the contributions Ernie Boyer made to the renewal of academic community through his ideas, his policy proposals, his suggestions for structures and strategies and tactics, and as we ask how we can extend the Boyer legacy, we must remember a simple truth: the key to community is the capacity planted deep in the human soul to open up, to reach out, to give and take in a fabric of morally persuasive relationships. And when those qualities are lacking in us and among us, "community" will be an artificial and fragile facade. We must remember, too, that we have at our disposal one of the greatest vehicles for soul making and community building known to humankind—the one called education.

I dedicate this book to my family—
Anne, Margaret, and Hannah.
Their unconditional love and abiding faith
sustain me at all times.
They are my true community.

Preface

Ernest L. Boyer Sr. served as president of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching for sixteen years (1979–1995). Under his leadership, The Carnegie Foundation published numerous books and reports describing the challenges and opportunities faced by colleges and universities across the nation. Of particular interest is that Boyer valued connections and believed that colleges and universities could create a community of learning that would serve as a model for the nation (McDonald and others, 2000). Specifically, he believed that "all parts of campus life—recruitment, orientation, curriculum, teaching, residence hall living, and the rest—must relate to one another and contribute to a sense of wholeness" (Boyer, 1987, p. 8).

In 1990, The Carnegie Foundation published a special report titled *Campus Life: In Search of Community*. In this pivotal report, Boyer addresses the increasing concern for the declining state of community in higher education. His examples include the growing number of problems resulting from inappropriate student behavior and from the competing interests, ideologies, and purposes within colleges and universities. In addition, the student population is becoming increasingly transient, and academic pursuits are not the key focus of students' lives.

Having described the problems associated with a lack of community in higher education, Boyer provides a new model of community

that aims to build bridges between "both academic and civic standards, and above all, to define with some precision the enduring values that undergird a community of learning" (p. 7).

To understand Boyer's model, we must first understand what he actually meant by "community." How does community translate into real-life rules and principles? Even though it's impossible to convey everything that's important about his community model here, we can illustrate some key points. Basically, Boyer felt that a college or university should be

- An educationally purposeful place where learning is the focus
- An open place where civility is affirmed
- A just place where persons are honored and diversity pursued
- A disciplined place where group obligations guide behavior
- A caring place where individuals are supported/service is encouraged
- A celebrative place where traditions are shared

To date, no follow-up report has been generated concerning how Boyer's (1990) work influenced the ongoing state of community in higher education. Specifically, did *Campus Life: In Search of Community* inspire the creation of models for building community on campus? If so, have these models been successfully implemented? If so, how can these models be replicated and generalized to other campuses that are seeking to create community among faculty, staff, and students? And finally, how have students been given a voice concerning building community on campus? *Creating Campus Community: In Search of Ernest Boyer's Legacy* has been written to answer these questions.

Boyer's Legacy

This book reviews the impact of Boyer's leadership, as well as the current state of the higher education community in a number of ways: a review of the current calling of campus community is explored; students' perceptions of community, based on varying institutional variables, are identified and described; community-building models (inspired by *Campus Life*) at five different colleges and universities are described; and new and developing community visions are identified, along with the next steps higher education must take to reclaim and strengthen community on campus.

Finally, this book is intended to be a resource for practitioners—faculty, staff, and students—who seek to cultivate and maintain the spirit of community that should undergird the collegiate experience. As its authors, we believe the combination of practical suggestions and new community models will be a valuable tool for colleges and universities interested in creating a stronger sense of community at their respective campuses.

Overview of the Contents

The uniqueness of this book will be demonstrated in the combination of authors and models that are included. Some of the authors, such as Parker Palmer, Grady Bogue, Larry Roper, and Betty Moore, are nationally known, respected authors and leaders in higher education, with significant contributions and numerous publications concerning building community at colleges and universities. Others have limited-to-little publishing experience but have created specific community-building models based on Boyer's (1990) work. The five institutions described, in combination, reveal connections among a number of institutional types: those in different geographical regions across the country, large public and small private institutions, and institutions with varying missions (research and liberal arts). Consequently, the power and utility of Boyer's (1990) model

of community demonstrates a capacity for building bridges in different institutional settings within higher education.

In the Foreword, Parker Palmer reminds us that Ernest Boyer called us to affirm a new vision of community for higher education to promote the common good for society. Palmer believes that Boyer did this by being a trusted companion and through his plain speech, moral sensibility, spiritual openness, practical wisdom, and, most important, his personal embodiment of grace.

Chapter One, by Grady Bogue, explores the true calling for higher education to create community among all constituents at a college or university. This chapter explores the current state of community, that is, the variables and the stakeholders that help shape community in higher education. Concrete examples are provided in other chapters. Beginning in Chapter Two, for example, five institutional case studies illustrate how Boyer's legacy has inspired new models for community development. Chapters Two and Three provide two institutional examples—one public research university and one small, religiously affiliated college—that review institutionwide strategies for creating community. Chapters Four, Five, and Six provide three specific program initiatives for creating a sense of community. Both public and private institutional models are provided.

Chapter Two, by Arthur Carter and Betty Moore, describes the process through which the Office of Student Affairs at Penn State University used the community principles as a foundation for guiding the division's strategic planning process and implementation of its educational programming and student services.

Chapter Three, by Cynthia Wells, describes the process that Messiah College followed for rebuilding the common sense of purpose that should anchor a religiously affiliated liberal arts college.

Chapter Four, by Larry Roper and Susan Longerbeam, describes the Division of Student Affairs Campus Compact at Oregon State University.

Chapter Five, by Cathy Brown, Mark Brown, and Robby Littleton, describes Carson-Newman College's Ernest L. Boyer Laboratory for Learning in which teams of faculty, staff, and students are charged with the responsibility of creating community through a seamless web of curricular and cocurricular educational opportunities.

Chapter Six, by Jean Bacon, describes a master's-level program in social work in which community is created through the search for knowledge, teaching, and community service.

Chapter Seven, by Bill McDonald, reviews a national study using the College and University Community Inventory (CUCI)—an instrument designed to measure community for students in colleges and universities; measurements are based on institutional variables such as regional location, size, and Carnegie classification.

Chapter Eight, by McDonald, Bacon, Brown, Brown, Carter, Littleton, Moore, Roper, and Wells, draws together the reflections and insights that have been gained from efforts to build community on the five campuses outlined in Chapters Two through Six.

The Afterword, by Parker Palmer, addresses the growing need for commitment to community in an educational environment that appears to lean more and more toward keeping people at a distance.

In conclusion, as the title of the book suggests, campus community is an evolving process. Indeed, as the book's authors, we are searching, learning, and growing as we explore the rich legacy of Ernest Boyer. In the final chapter of *Campus Life: In Search of Community,* Boyer describes his vision of a new model of community that benefits both higher education and the society by promoting the common good. This is the true essence of Boyer's legacy and a challenge that demands our best efforts to ensure that his vision and leadership are not forgotten. This book is our attempt to answer Boyer's (1990) challenge that "higher education has an important obligation . . . to define larger, more inspired goals, and in so doing serve as a model for the nation and the world (p. xiii).