Community Inquiry (122)

Communities face a wide variety of challenges in areas of health, education, economic development, sustainable environments, and social order. But regardless of the difficulty of these challenges, a necessary condition for addressing them is for communities to find ways for members to work together. Too often, community members work at cross purposes and fail to develop what Jane Addams called "the capacity for affectionate interpretation."

Community inquiry is what Addams and Dewey called their theory and practice for reshaping communities and, thus, society at large. Community inquiry provides a theoretical and action framework for people to come together to develop shared capacity and work on common problems in an experimental and critical manner.

Written by Ann Bishop and Chip Bruce

Illegitimate Theater (123)

Theater, viewing and participating in performances, is an ancient yet vital cultural force. Theater — particularly its "illegitimate" varieties — can also punctuate the ordinary and thrust new and unexpected experiences into everyday life. It has the power to bring a person into new, temporary realities in which the self is momentarily forgotten and submerged. Theater can empower the spectator with insight and possibilities.

Anybody, at least in theory, can practice the craft of illegitimate theater. The "performances" that come from this practice can be simple or elaborate, impromptu or painstakingly rehearsed. The point is to cause ripples in the everyday stream of life. Illegitimate theater can be used to provoke emotional reactions, discussion or reflection. Practiced successfully and in a great number of venues, illegitimate theater could help foster positive social change and increased democratization of culture.

Written by Mark Harrison and Douglas Schuler

Power Research (128)

Powerful people and organizations tend to abuse their power. Without understanding who has power, how the power is wielded, and how that power can be kept within legitimate boundaries, people with less power can be ignored, swindled, lied to, led into war, or otherwise mistreated.

Research power — what it is, how it is organized and applied, who has it. Although it is important to make the findings freely available. It is at least as important to disseminate the ideas and techniques that help people initiate their own power research projects. This pattern particularly applies to government and corporations but other people, institutions, and groups (such as hate groups, militias or organized crime families) need to be thoroughly investigated as well.

Written by Douglas Schuler

Activist Road Trip (134)

It is surprising how little people really experience and learn when they travel. They often seem to be in a hurry to get to to a place where an "expert" has told them they should go. Many people would like to see and learn about how people live and the challenges they face, but it’s often difficult to do. Also, for most people in the world, travel is costly, is sometimes perceived as dangerous, and there are lots of borders that can block our progress.

Travel offers immeasurable insights if people are receptive to them. The trouble is, of course, that "it's possible to travel all around the world and not get anywhere at all." This pattern is designed to prevent that from happening. People can explore places en route to, or returning from, other events to observe social realities. One doesn't have to travel very far — physically — to find unexplored regions. The Activist Road Trip can be done in your own region or city.

Written by Douglas Schuler