

**THE JOURNEY
OF
THE LEARNING COMMUNITY:
CONNECTIONS, REFLECTIONS AND DIRECTIONS**

*Report of the
Building Bridges Between Practice and Knowledge
in Nonprofit Management Education
Learning Community Meeting
Buenos Aires, Argentina
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This document affords a glimpse into a moment in the life of a five-year funding initiative of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. The following information will provide helpful context.

The Building Bridges Initiative

The *Building Bridges between Practice and Knowledge in Nonprofit Management Education* initiative includes 19 projects in the United States and eight programs in Latin American nations. The initiative supports efforts that create active two-way partnerships to improve practice and build knowledge for nonprofit management.

The Journey Reports

The members of the 27 project leadership teams assemble annually for a Learning Community Meeting. These meetings are documented in a series of reports called *The Journey of the Learning Community*. This report, the second in the series, is produced in three languages to signal the international importance of the 1999 Learning Community Meeting in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Participants in the 1999 Learning Community Meeting are the primary audience for this report – everyone who attended was profoundly moved by the international experience. A secondary audience is the Kellogg Foundation, as this meeting is the Foundation's first cross-regional networking conference. Finally, the Journey Reports may be instructive to others who employ meeting formats to build networks among participants.

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Support for Nonprofit Management Education

General awareness of nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations as an economic sector of society increased dramatically in the last quarter of the 20th century. Rapid growth of the sector spawned the development of new ways of thinking about the management of the organizations themselves – developing boards of directors, funding sources, volunteers, and the like – as well as a new field of study that encompassed not only management but also philanthropy, civil society, and public policy.

In keeping with its mission “to help people help themselves through the practical application of knowledge and resources to improve their quality of life and that of future generations,” the Kellogg Foundation has been a major funder of nonprofit management programs in higher education. The ultimate aim of the Building Bridges Initiative is improving the quality of life in communities through better management and leadership of the nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations that serve these communities.

On the afternoon of the third day of the Learning Community Meeting (LCM), participants gathered to debrief site visit experiences held earlier in the day in the greater Buenos Aires area. A few individuals began with comments about things they had seen related to social change, such as youth working in programs with the intention to go back to their own community to make a difference, a priest living in the community his program serves, and the importance of student participation in non-governmental organizations (NGO) efforts.

Shortly into the comments, the style shifted. People began speaking with clear emotional overtones, as they related details about seeing economically poor neighborhoods, hearing Argentine NGO staff describe their work, or experiencing the organizational climate of the site. It was as if the air in the debriefing room took on an electric quality. As individual after individual stood to speak, there was realization that intellect and emotion were no longer separate ways of comprehending the morning's experience, but were actually aspects of a common, larger phenomenon. Participants were indeed bridging. But this time, they were bridging their "minds" and "hearts," as much as bridging North and Latin American, or academic and practitioner, approaches.

I. INTRODUCTION

It has been a little over a year since the previous Learning Community Meeting (LCM) took place in Battle Creek, Michigan. As the vignette above makes clear, the Learning Community (LC) is steadily progressing toward coming together as a group with strong elements of shared vision, identity, and purpose.

This report describes and analyzes stability and change in the LC, as witnessed in the Buenos Aires meeting. Participants have sought to meet challenges and build on opportunities. This time, challenges and opportunities were refracted through the experience of Buenos Aires, and through the lens of nonprofit management in Latin America.

We focus on the successes of the LC by demonstrating areas of progress, and by also showing how the LC continues to struggle with some of the most thorny and difficult issues of building bridges. These bridges—between universities and communities, between academic faculty and nonprofit leaders, and between teaching and learning—are important, exciting, and difficult to build.

In presenting the successes and challenges of this year's meeting, we use the same conceptual framework as last year: (1) building relationships, (2) engaging in collective action, and (3) identifying and addressing issues of power.¹ Throughout the meeting, these themes played out in at least four ways:

In movement. In the closing ceremony at Recoleta Cultural Center, dancers performed scenarios of running backwards, swimming upstream, falling down, picking each other up, joy, anger, competition, and bewilderment. The performance used both synchronized and conflicting rhythms. The message came through loud and clear: working together for collective change involves celebration, challenge, and conflict.

In words. Atilio Borón, executive secretary of CLASCO (Latin American Social Services Council), the keynote speaker at the opening dinner, noted, “In Latin America about two-thirds of the population lives in poverty...who will be on the other side when the bridge is built?” Many participants discussed variations on this theme in subsequent sessions. Addressing issues of power is integral to the success of the work.

In observation and experience. The site visits provided the chance to see ideas and passion translated into action. Participants met nonprofit leaders and university-based faculty who, similar to North Americans, shared relatively privileged positions in society, but who were using their institutional power and creativity to bring about change. Some LC members met residents and direct service providers. At the University Interdisciplinary Center for Health, National University of La Plata, for example, LC visitors learned from a group of young people challenged with developmental disabilities who grew their own food and ran their own business, as well as from the youth workers who stood proudly behind them.

In celebration and relaxation. There was also the experience of enjoying one another’s company. During breaks and at meals, especially the social evenings events, there was frequent joking and laughter. Building personal and professional relationships is a strong underpinning of the work.

PURPOSE OF MEETING

The meeting began on Sunday evening, October 3, with a reception and dinner. Approximately 112 individuals, representing seven countries, attended. Group members represented the twenty U.S. project teams, eight Latin American partner teams, Initiative consultants, and staff from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF).

In his opening presentation, Bob Long, WKKF program director in Philanthropy and Volunteerism, emphasized three of the overarching goals of the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI):

Develop responsive programs in higher education. Nonprofit management education programs should be led by the needs of practice. Conversely, practitioners need to participate in research and the institutionalization of best practice. Both produce relevant theory and practice. As such, the needs of academicians and practitioners are intertwined.

Implement more widely available educational opportunities. Across the BBI projects, there is intentional development of a spectrum of educational programs. Models include short courses, certificate programs, and graduate degrees. Delivery methods include traditional campus-based courses, seminars, and distance learning. Design factors include cost, length, locations, and stage of the student’s career.

Promote a more diverse leadership pool. Projects are striving to increase the diversity of faculty and students in courses of study, as well as in leadership positions in nonprofit organizations.

In sum, Long stressed that accomplishment of these goals will contribute to the mosaic of BBI's ultimate vision: improving the quality of life in communities through improving the leadership and management of nonprofit organizations.

In that context, Long then encouraged participants to reach out and interact with each other and the setting. He developed a metaphor, likening the conference to a "party" where one invites new encounters. The party metaphor was intended to convey the spirit of the meeting as essentially one that participants would create; CenterPoint Institute and WKKF were providing the means and support, but it was up to participants to "get out on the dance floor with each other!" Just as the essence of dancing is to partner well together, the meeting (indeed the Initiative itself) is about establishing and working together through partnerships.

Andrés Thompson, WKKF program director for Latin American and Caribbean Programs, then spoke. According to Thompson, the LC was explicitly designed to take advantage of the setting of Buenos Aires. By considering historical, cultural, and socioeconomic differences between North and Latin America, the hope was to generate a context conducive to examining assumptions about the nonprofit sector. Such examination would build on each participant learning from another's experiences, and result in the setting of individual and collective goals. Thompson stressed that this was a time to "interconnect the vision for change that drives the Latin Americans with the organization that seems to drive the North Americans, to bring them together as one... to balance leadership and management."

Thompson further emphasized that the cultural differences provide a foundation for "continued bridging" and for introspection. His charge to the group was to use the meeting as a time to explore and bring together "mind, body, and soul" for the full-time job of bringing about social change. In this regard, Thompson urged participants to reckon with the differences between leadership and management, and to consider how they might be balanced. Clearly, this point of view added another dimension to the theme of "two-way flow."

After Long's and Thompson's introductory remarks, group comments were invited from the LC. People, some at length and some with brevity, articulated their hopes and dreams. Almost everyone seemed to resonate not only with the introductory remarks, but also with a statement made from the floor by Pedro Krotsch, professor of sociology of education at National University of La Plata and the University of Buenos Aires:

In both North and South America, outreach typically comes from the edges of the university. How does this become integrated into the university? How does this happen? I think it takes an interdisciplinary perspective of problem-solving in the community. We need to change pedagogical practices, like we need to do service learning. And, yes, unidirectional learning has to be confronted. It is not just university to community. I hope we start to change this together.

STRUCTURE OF THE MEETING

At the opening session, Katheryn Heidrich, president of CenterPoint Institute, summarized the structural context for the LCMs in terms of past, present, and future. Last year's meeting in Battle Creek was intended to allow leadership teams to become more acquainted with one another and with WKKF programs and personnel. The present meeting in Buenos Aires afforded multiple opportunities to consider the nonprofit sector, and the work of BBI, through cross-

cultural perspective. It is hoped that next year's meeting in Washington, D.C. will add a dimension of external presentation, making the work of BBI projects visible to policy makers and the public.

As articulated by Heidrich, the specific objectives for the current meeting were:

- Contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the Third Sector's relationship to higher education both in the United States and in Latin America;
- Extend knowledge of other projects and programs in BBI; network around shared interest; have opportunities to develop connecting strategies;
- Deepen relationships within teams.

The first full day, October 4, was devoted primarily to opening presentations and project updates; October 5 to connecting theme breakouts; October 6 to site visits; and October 7 to a public meeting and closing ceremony at Recoleta Park.

The meeting occurred through a decentralized arrangement, emphasizing rapport and shared learning. The meeting was largely built around peer exchanges, interspersed with periods of reflection and relaxation. The peer exchanges occurred at several levels. There was time for each project team to caucus, as well as periods for cross-project connections and learning. Exchange occurred over food, also. Few people, we suspect, will forget the laughter and camaraderie during the opening reception, the dinner at Puerto Madero, or the evening at La Ventana. Finally, there were the exchanges that occurred across nationalities. During the site visits to universities and nonprofit agencies throughout Buenos Aires, for example, ideas and professional cards were shared across project and national boundaries. Photographs were also snapped as mementos.

The focus on decentralized conferencing and peer exchanges worked well, according to everyone we spoke with. The general level of enthusiasm with which each day's activities were embraced also seems to indicate that the LC is gaining a comfort level, and a level of synergy. As two people noted: "We have all achieved things over the past year, so now we have something concrete to talk about, and we don't feel as competitive with each other," and "I like the openness of this meeting as compared to the one in Battle Creek. Having less speeches is real good. It allows for more time to have deeper discussion."

II. ANALYSIS OF THE JOURNEY

In The 1998 LCM report, we concluded:

The September conference set the stage and conditions for BBI stakeholders to begin to cohere as a learning community. Obviously, the LC is in a nascent stage, and the BBI itself is yet young. Time will tell if and how the LC consolidates itself and what dynamics it helps effect. As a result of the current [1998] conference, the LC appears to be excellently positioned to become both functional and productive. It appears that if the LC maintains its focus, it is likely to experience success.

In that report, we observed that project team members were beginning to coalesce around three opportunities and challenges inherent in all learning communities: (1) building personal and professional relationships, (2) engaging in collective action and shared learning, and (3) identifying and addressing issues of power.

Building “community” in the Initiative has continued over the past year, and it is evident that the meeting in Buenos Aires served as a powerful experience that honored the successes of the past year—both individual and collective—while at the same time, provided a new spark to fire momentum over the next year.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Building relationships is a critical undergirding of endeavors that aim to effect broad and far-reaching systems change. A dense web of relationships helps foster thinking on a systems level, mutual learning, and shared vision. In addition, having benefit of the support and assistance of like-minded and like-goal-oriented people helps all members meet the challenges that discovery, learning, and change pose.

Individuals came to the Battle Creek meeting with uneven levels of familiarity with one another. Some people had either worked with or known others for years; some, even within their projects teams, were new. However, we noted many instances where participants extended themselves in an effort to become acquainted with newcomers, or to deepen already-begun relationships. At times the tone of interaction was serious and agreement was not always achieved (nor was it necessarily the goal); at other times, high degrees of interest, support, and humor characterized interactions. Participants were definitely building a foundation of community. This year, it was easy to see that participants made headway in continuing to build community by building both personal and professional relationships.

Personal Relationships

It was exciting to observe participants as they rekindled relationships or solidified extant relationships “down here in Argentina.” A mood of ease existed that was not present last year. People looked forward to the small group meetings, and appeared to enjoy chatting with one another during breaks; in fact, they often had to be strongly encouraged to return to larger sessions when the agenda called for them. We observed much cross-group mingling, whether it was to discuss an issue, take a tour, or go out to eat.

Some LC members were unable to come to this meeting, and were the focus of private conversations. At the beginning of the meeting their absence was cast in terms of frustration; the feeling was that those who did not attend thought, “their responsibilities at home were more important than mine.” Towards the end of the meeting, the tenor changed noticeably. Participants appeared disappointed because their absent colleagues had missed a wonderful experience, and in so doing, had lost a chance to be part of an emerging and important community of professionals.

Exploring Professional Identities

The distinction between “academic” and “practitioner” continues to be a core issue. Last year, the term “bridger”—individuals employed in academe who have practical experience in the nonprofit sector—was introduced. Last year, participants encouraged faculty in higher education to widen their professional identities to include practitioner and advocate for nonprofit organizations. Similarly, nonprofit leaders were challenged not to see themselves only as technicians, but also as scholars with their own areas of expertise.

This year, we heard scarce mention of “bridger.” Instead, participants seemed to revert to dichotomous thinking about “academic” and “practitioner.” The issue was expressed directly at an impromptu meeting of practitioners, held the evening of Day 3 (see below in section, “Identifying and Addressing Issues of Power”).

Nonetheless, there were instances indicating an inclination to identify more closely with project teams. In large group sessions, for example, speakers stated their team affiliations, not their institutional or agency affiliations.

ENGAGING IN COLLECTIVE ACTION

Collective action lies at the core of the Initiative. Ultimately, BBI will be judged a success when groups of people are working together to bridge the gaps between universities and communities, scholars and nonprofit managers, and theory and practice all for the benefit of nonprofit management education. Collective action requires careful planning to create the conditions that spark the imagination and passion of stakeholders. In BBI, such planning and action is designed to occur both within local projects as well as across projects.

In 1998, change was just beginning. There were few cross-project collaborations, and at the local level, partnerships were just being developed. For this reason, LC members were challenged throughout the meeting to bring the possibility of collective action to fruition. While many challenges remain, there is evidence that collective action has begun, and that there are structures and incentives in place to maintain the momentum.

Action Within Projects

The project updates were animated this year. Many participants commented that a sufficient amount of achievement made it possible to now speak in concrete terms—to note the highs and lows, as well as to ask for and give input. “Last year we were mostly planning, not doing,” observed one, “Now we can really share because we’ve got something to chew on!” In fact, most participants wanted more time for the site updates, and they wanted to be able to hear about more projects in more depth. We observed much note taking. This year, the audience was looking for, and receiving, information and tips from colleagues.

For example, discussion among one group of projects focused on outreach and delivery methods for courses and workshops. One team noted that often nonprofit organizations are hard put to invest in a series of training events for employees; an overriding concern is where the next funding grant will come from. Another team spoke to the challenges of offering courses through

electronic venues. This team was learning that persons employed in nonprofit organizations favored the convenience of on-line courses over interpersonal connection and discussion in a classroom setting. In response, participants in the audience not only posed clarifying questions for these teams; they offered suggestions for practical action.

Paralleling the liveliness of project updates were many of the project team meetings. Teams are now at a point where their action steps are concrete and deliberate. In lists of next action steps from team reports, the words “continue,” “complete,” and “implement” appear frequently. Of course, “develop,” “explore,” and “initiate” are also on the lists, but not as often as last year.

Action Across Projects

One of the purposes of convening the LC annually is to help foster relationships among members, which will result in collective action. During the past year, some projects forged connections with one another. The following examples are not meant to be exhaustive, but they serve as illustrations for the breadth of activity that has taken place.

- A fruit of 1998’s LCM was the convening of the Western States teams (American Humanics, Arizona State University, California State University at Los Angeles, Portland State University, and University of Texas at San Antonio) in June of 1999. The projects are focusing on three common themes: (1) multiculturalism and diversity; (2) funding and institutionalization; and (3) curriculum. A summary report of the meeting was distributed at the LCM, and Walter Ellis, associate dean and professor in the College of Urban and Public Affairs at Portland State University, presented an overview. The group was energized by the experience, and they have identified a series of action steps to take in the near future.
- A George Mason University team member now has a place on Georgetown University’s project board, a result of networking at the LCM in Battle Creek.
- Arizona State University has partnered with the Learning Institute to employ distance-learning technology for the purpose of extending courses to a wide audience of nonprofit personnel. ASU has already used some of the LI curricula, and will employ a series of five satellite sessions in the spring of 2000.
- Immediately before this Buenos Aires meeting, several U.S. and Latin American team members attended a seminar sponsored by the Fundación Getulio Vargas in São Paulo, Brazil. The purpose was to discuss development of the Third sector. Individuals from the Learning Institute, Case Western Reserve University, California State at Los Angeles, State University of New York at Albany, City University of New York and Indiana University and individuals from Universidad de São Paulo, Universidad Iberoamericana Golfo Centro, and Getulio Vargas met together with representatives from Latin America over three days. Topics included the development of nonprofit management and leadership, research, public policy, and relationships between public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

Connect! Conectar!

To help further cultivate cross-project connections, the better part of one day's agenda was devoted to encouraging various teams to meet and discuss six themes running through BBI projects: (1) organizing system; (2) curriculum development; (3) outreach education; (4) diversity in leadership of the field; (5) local partnerships; and (6) Latin American and Caribbean programs. While there was no expectation that such meetings would produce next-step actions, it was hoped that teams would explore possibilities. If groups wished to pursue a course of action beyond the LCM, it was announced they could apply to CenterPoint for minigrant funds to cover expenses.

On the first evening of the LCM, a short survey consisting of two open-ended questions was distributed. In the opening presentation for Connecting Themes two days later, Mark Wilson, member of the initiative leadership team, highlighted the DNA metaphor of "bringing together two strands to create something new and unique." In summarizing survey results, Wilson reported that the words "community," "creativity," and "efficiency" dominated the reports of those who filled out the questionnaire.

Wilson also spoke to the issue of motivation. People in the LC are seeking to benefit the university and nonprofit communities equally. Identified strategies were: be inclusive, foster mutual experiences, respond to the other party's needs, share resources, and help educate leaders in current issues. These themes, derived for the collective voice of the LC, were discussed throughout the conference.

The themes, for instance, were readily apparent in the breakout session discussions, as witnessed in the examples of the California State University at Los Angeles, Georgetown University, and State University of New York at Albany teams.

- The work of California State University at Los Angeles (CSULA) is practitioner and university co-driven, and team members are seeking, in their own words, "to create a new model of university-community relations." The purpose of the model is to create relations that explicitly benefit and meet core needs of both community organizations and their managers, and universities and their scholars. The project's "test case" and "model development" is with the California Red Cross. Faculty and students at CSULA have conducted an in-depth needs assessment for the Red Cross, using surveys and focus groups, and then will provide training to California Red Cross. This work, done at the request of the organization, is meeting fundamental needs. At the same time, faculty and students benefit because they "learn from practice," and obtain good ideas for future research. CSULA hopes to engage in a similar process with organizations in California's mental health and public school systems.
- Georgetown University and its partner, the Support Center of Washington, (Washington, D.C.), have found that many nonprofit managers are seeking more intensive, organization-specific information and assistance. For this reason, the project offers certain organizations individualized assistance. For selected organizations, the project provides five day-long trainings for organizational leaders, followed by twenty hours of executive consulting. At the same time, the project is also working with a coalition of nonprofit organizations to provide education and networking services to those in Washington, D.C. unable to participate in the daylong training series.

- State University of New York at Albany is seeking to provide information, training, and technical assistance to statewide advocacy agencies. Because it is not feasible to provide individualized service to each, a consortium has been formed. The consortium serves as an infrastructure for networking and sharing information between the university and the advocacy organizations. Deliberate efforts are made to empower practitioners. For example, the consortium, not the project, decides how to bring on new members and it sets the rules for operations. Progress has been slow, but deliberate, in terms of making these connections. It has been difficult to expand the consortium beyond its core group of members. However, as different agencies begin to hear about the benefits of consortium, in terms of providing a forum for “action-oriented” communication and research, it is expected that the partnership will grow and become even more effective.

Although there was an uneven level of participation in the Connecting Breakout Sessions, with some teams planning to continue the interaction, and others not, it is fair to say that several of the groups experienced a deeper level of dialogue not possible in the project updates. Not only did groups start with a topical theme around which to connect, but they also had three hours together—time enough perhaps to generate an initial sense of coherence around the theme, even if the choice is not to pursue it further at this time.

Responsiveness to the Field and Two-Way Flow of Information

For as much as project presentations, cross-team discussions, and dialogue during site visits exhibited the widely-held philosophy of listening to communities and the needs of personnel in the nonprofit sector, and of committing resources to building bridges, it has been and remains a challenge to integrate the voices and practices of nonprofit leaders fully into the projects. It is becoming clear that such integration cannot simply be an “add-on;” it must be systematically integrated into the foundation of the project.

This is not to say that the universities in the projects are fully responsive to the field. Nearly everyone at the meeting would agree that there is a long way to go. As discussed in the next section, for instance, there is a critical mass of practitioners within the BBI who feel that progress could, and should, be quicker and more intentional, both within their own projects as well as within the LC. There are many barriers that need attention. One participant commented that the key question to be asking in the Initiative is, “In what areas do practitioners drive our agenda?”

That being emphasized, it is also true that a greater consensus has emerged among academicians and practitioners that BBI is centrally about the creation and strengthening of nonprofit management education programs within higher education institutions. As Dan Moore, W. K. Kellogg Foundation vice president – programs, highlighted in his closing presentation, this is the reason that the grants went to universities rather than community organizations. However, Moore stressed that the strategy for achieving quality nonprofit management programs depends on the full engagement of practitioners in the process because knowledge is developed and resides in both groups. It cannot work without finding institutionalized ways of responding to and following the voices and wisdom of nonprofit managers over the long term.

IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING ISSUES OF POWER

As noted in the previous LCM report, large and complex Initiatives like BBI have to confront issues of power. In Battle Creek, participants touched on the multiple dimensions and levels of power enveloping the Initiative. One emphasis permeating various sessions concerned the historical lack of full contact between scholars and practitioners, which has resulted in, among other things, a lack of mutual, full understanding of the contexts—indeed constraints—in which scholars and practitioners work.

Shared Learning and Two-Way Flow

Evident in Buenos Aires was progress made toward mutual recognition, appreciation, and understanding of the different spheres and structural constraints that often operate as barriers to building bridges personnel in institutions of higher education and nonprofit organizations. Because project team members have had sufficient time to delve into action, they have necessarily had more contact and interaction with one another. For example, during one project update, a practitioner vividly described frustrations she had experienced in organizing meetings and workshops for nonprofit employees. The diligence of her efforts had been met with poor response rates, despite her many strategies of communication. She ended the story telling how she could now better appreciate similar feelings among academic colleagues when they spoke of “disconnects” with community nonprofits. In another project update a faculty member concluded:

It’s always easy for academicians to slip back and forget the practitioners. That is why it is important for us to always put lots of practitioners on the advisory board, to share the power as much as we can. We still struggle, however, with how to share the learning and the technology that exists in the university.

While increased contact can result in deeper understanding, full understanding does not naturally result from contact alone. There remain fundamental barriers inherent in institutional reward systems, availability_of resources, and even in language. Participants referenced these facets of power in many ways. One project team reported, for instance, “We’ve learned that some academic institutions are easier and more receptive to linking than others.” Reflected another, “People in the community may be under the impression that university time (students’ time, faculty members’ time) is an unused resource, while those within the university may not realize the intensity of day-to-day demands faced by practitioners.”

Continued Explorations In Power

Although many sessions and discussions last year in Battle Creek addressed power, one of the more dramatic occurred in the Networking Discussion Cluster, “Outreach to Communities of Color.” The fulcrum of debate was issues of contact and understanding between higher education and nonprofit organizations. In Buenos Aires, an ad hoc meeting of practitioners was held on Day 3. We noted striking similarity between the two sessions, separated in time by a year, but not in intent, content, and tone.

As in Battle Creek, practitioners continued to express feelings of marginalization vis-a-vis academic colleagues both within their projects and the Initiative itself. Reasons for holding the meeting were expressed as:

- Identifying which individuals at the LCM work primarily in practice;
- Becoming more acquainted with one another;
- Exploring ways to amplify voices of practitioners in a university context; and
- Critiquing the notion that knowledge and practice lie on opposite ends of a continuum.

Discussion was impassioned. Because the meeting was an impromptu one, impelled by several informal discussions prior to Day 3, there was not a set agenda. At a minimum, people seemed to want to put words to their feelings. It was a collective effort to wrestle with feelings that many thought they alone experienced. The effort was a necessary first step in finding a collective voice.

Many practitioners related that while they feel respected on their particular teams, they do not feel fully valued yet as equal partners within the Initiative. A few, for example, interpreted the Initiative banner, “Building Bridges Between Practice and Knowledge,” as not only illustrating, but also reinforcing, erroneous assumptions; for example, that knowledge remains the purview of higher education, that knowledge should be built largely within higher education, and that knowledge flows out of higher education in a “one way bridge.”

Participants also remarked that language at LCMs tends to favor the academic. One person stated, for instance, that she had not participated in the site visit debriefing session (occurring just prior to the practitioner meeting) because she thought the questions were designed to address curriculum development, rather than discuss practice. Many echoed the sentiment, but added that such tendencies are not the fault of the LCM. The inclinations are embedded in society as well as the structure of the Initiative itself; the grants were given to universities for the purpose of developing and improving educational programs.

It is not solely in discourse that practitioners experienced marginalization, however. Participants registered concern about discussions of sustainability as applying to universities. Many questioned what will happen to the practitioner voice on teams at the end of the grant period.

Toward the end of the meeting, the mood turned to practical actions to strengthen practitioner voice and role within BBI. An electronic list server and submitting a proposal to CenterPoint to hold a meeting in the near future constituted the main ideas.

Lessons from Latin America

Atilio Borón, in his opening dinner speech, and Pedro Krotzsch and Andrés Thompson in a concept paper sent in the reading packet to participants², suggested that the nonprofit enterprise, and the move to strengthen ties between universities and communities to improve civil society, follow different discourses in North and Latin America. North American discourse tends to emphasize improvement of nonprofit “effectiveness” and “efficiency”; Latin American discourse the salvation and support of civil society. Different social and historical backgrounds contribute to the different emphases. Borón estimated that in Latin America, two thirds of the population lives in poverty, without access to basic human services or even indispensable resources, such as clean water. Because of a progressive weakening of the state apparatus and repressive regimes, NGOs are being called on more than ever before to fill the void.

Throughout the conference, particularly after site visits, participants dialoged about nonprofit discourse, engaging in informal as well as formal debate. Many perspectives were put forth, but general consensus held that there is a legitimate place in the debate for nonprofit management addressing human needs, and that building bridges between universities and communities should contain a strong element of critiquing political, social, and economic forces that create dire and wide-spread human needs in the first place. Several individuals pointed out that even if the nonprofit sector becomes more efficient, unless social and political issues are confronted, the effort will be for naught. “The Initiative is about social change—but social change by degree or by kind?” summed one participant.

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have subtitled this report “Connections, Reflections, and Directions” for two reasons. We think it embodies the essence of the LCM in Buenos Aires. We also think it captures a stage in the “life history” of the LC. The LC has cemented enough so that members are exploring together, and have begun to build an esprit that adds up to more than a collection of individual projects. At the same time, the LC is young enough that it is attempting to put into practice a knowledge it is yet developing. Academic and nonprofit leaders, neither of whom have the full picture, are deepening their understanding of how their enterprises are necessarily complementary and interdependent.

At the LCM closing, Andrés Thompson provided comments that likely reflected the feelings of many participants:

I think about Learning... Community... Meeting.... Yes, I think we learned some things, many of which were not in the plan. There was good learning about nonprofit management education and about social change. Community, I think we are still building it. It is getting there. We are bringing together practitioners, schools, institutions. And, meeting, I think that was good here in Buenos Aires. We meet to learn together, to think together, and to act together.

Connections

By the end of the meeting, it was clear that the objectives of extending knowledge of other projects, networking around shared interests, and deepening relationships within teams had been accomplished. The extent of camaraderie and collegial exchange appeared to represent an increase over last year, as did the general level of synergy. Of course, there were disagreements, and emotions were not always positive, but this is not what synergy is about. Synergy is about a creative dynamism. And the creative spark actually arises first from individuals getting what they want and need from the group.

Synergy depends on knowledge and understanding that issue from dialoging with others, and from active learning in the presence of others where individuals can discuss, investigate, and “try out” different viewpoints. A major lesson about synergy from Buenos Aires is that the work of the Initiative entails more than connections between individuals, as important as they are. Connections are also needed between heart, mind, and spirit within individuals. Participants were reminded that the BBI work, because it is about social change and creating something new, means more than “just doing a job.”

The LC enjoys perhaps a unique opportunity in being able to meet annually. There is recognition that in an Initiative the size and scope of BBI, it is crucial that individuals have opportunity to connect in multiple ways across different projects. Because the projects are many, the issues complex, and the work difficult, connecting face-to-face, and in smaller forums, hold great promise to help facilitate LC efforts. It is for these reasons that members are being offered opportunities to apply for minigrant funds, as well as access to other supports from CenterPoint to further endeavors.

Reflections

Every person we spoke with left Buenos Aires excited and energized, with at least one tangible idea to pursue back at home. Every person we talked with called the meeting a success. Yes, there were probably some who hid their feelings. Most certainly disagreements remain. We are not saying that everybody went home with the same assessment of the conference. Different people would like to emphasize different issues or use time differently during the LC. But the net result is that people were glad to have had a productive and enjoyable experience. They felt cared for by LC organizers, and greatly valued the acquaintances and relationships formed across continents.

The Cultural Mirror

People also left in a reflective spirit. On the one hand, one could not help but be overwhelmed by seeing poverty, pollution, recent history of Argentina's military dictatorship, and the effects these conditions have had on citizens and institutions. On the other hand, the creativity, passion, and commitment of the people met during site visits made a deep impression on participants. As a few visitors to the Universidad Nacional de Lanus described it:

“Visits to such places...built in the brown field remains of an old British rail car repair yard opened eyes to what employing one's assets really means. We also witnessed how the university can truly be part of community and the lives of citizens, regardless of status”.

We suspect that memories such as these will remain with LC members for a long time.

The Latin American looking glass also illuminated how the bridge between different sectors might be strengthened. Throughout the meeting, simultaneous translation in Spanish and English eased the flow of communication and leveled the playing field. Metaphorically, the lesson might be explored with application to facilitating communication across academic and practitioner lines. Different language, different styles of discussion, and different “cultural” settings continue to stymie full communication at LCMs as well as on the list server. In fact, one LC member, a nonprofit leader, posted a concept paper about the communication gap between academicians and practitioners on the list server just prior to the LCM.

A Place to Practice and Learn

As with last year, the Learning Community provided members with a time and place to practice and learn. Once again, some of the most difficult moments in the meeting and some of the most

exciting insights revolved around the challenges of fully integrating the knowledge and methods of academicians and practitioners.

From our perspective as documenters and analysts of the LC, however, we have noticed a subtle shift. Last year, almost all of the discussion was focused at the institutional level (i.e, what does it mean and take for universities to form meaningful partnerships with communities and non-profit organizations?) At this meeting, the “personal” started to emerge with vigor. Although individuals maintained “academic” and “practitioner” terminology, in content some of the scholars started to speak from their experience as practitioners. Some of the nonprofit managers spoke about themselves as scholars who had a knowledge base of equal value to that included in academic journals. These discussions, while brief, were illuminating and seemed to bring members closer together. In future meetings, it might be useful to further explore the personal—what it means for a scholar to also be a practitioner within BBI, and vice-versa, what it means for a nonprofit manager to also be a scholar?

Directions

At a minimum, there were three meeting themes that challenged participants. Foremost was the emphasis from Latin Americans on the *explicit priority* of social change as being at the forefront of nonprofit management education. Ultimately, success will be determined by the extent to which programs support and help create leaders who are able to bring about positive change.

Second was the importance of markets. In Latin America, the goal is a safety net for those who have been unable to compete in the market place and/or those who have been oppressed by the market economy. One participant from Universidad Iberoamericana Plantel Santa Fe, for instance, spoke about the most recent 150 graduates from their interdisciplinary program of nonprofit management. Only five of the graduates have gone into nonprofit management. The reason is that market forces specify low wages for nonprofit management work. As a result, recent graduates typically take jobs in organizations, such as banks, where remuneration is higher. Another LC member observed that she knew of only one person in the LC whose primary occupation is in the private sector. The implication was that the LC should take a look at market forces, as it attempts to grapple with macro level forces that create the need for nonprofits.

And third, the meeting brought to the fore the realization that much expertise and nonprofit management education already occurs in community settings. The university is but one, albeit major, place where education occurs. The work needs to build also on the voice of exemplary practitioners. Structures and methods need to be created and supported to fully utilize the organizational capacity that already exists. Several practitioners suggested that the books, articles, journals, and curricula they use would prove useful to the Initiative.

The final morning of the LCM was devoted to a public meeting held in the Recoleta Cultural Center. The purpose was to increase awareness of nonprofit management programs in higher education in Latin America. Included in the audience were representatives from universities, government, and Third Sector organizations. An article about the event appeared in *Tercer Sector*. Although the meeting gained little other media coverage, Andrés Thompson received several follow-up comments from people who indicated their enthusiasm and desire for more such meetings. As a result, a national meeting involving universities and Third Sector organizations was held in early 2000.

As the LCM made clear, there are many bridges being built in BBI and many more that could be built. Each participant received a maté cup to take home—a memento from Argentina, where sharing the maté cup expresses “community.” Slowly, but deliberately, a collective spirit is being developed in the LC. Over the next year, the charge is to continue to build on community and spirit, in terms of cross-project action and academic-practitioner interaction, and to build on the accomplishments achieved so far. In that way, the LC will have much to communicate when it makes the work of the BBI projects visible to policy makers and the public in Washington, D.C. next year.

¹ Linda Camino and Shepherd Zeldin, *The Journey of the Learning Community: Moving from Imagination to Reality in Nonprofit Management Education*, February 21, 1999.

² Pedro Krotsch and Andres Thompson, “*Linking the University and the Nonprofit Sector in Latin America: Is Management the Only Bridges?*”, Concept paper prepared for the Learning Community Meeting, 1999.

Learning Community Meeting
October 3-7, 1999
Buenos Aires, Argentina
Program Overview

Sunday, October 3

7:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Reception.
Re-connect with the Learning Community.

8:00 – 10:00 p.m.

Welcome and dinner.
After-dinner remarks: Atilio Boron, executive secretary of CLASCO (Latin American Social Services Council).

Monday, October 4

7:30 – 8:30 a.m.

Breakfast buffet in hotel.

9:00 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

Overview of the Learning Community Meeting program.
Briefing on the program elements.

Vision for the Building Bridges Initiative.
Present the vision for the Initiative, review the goals and guiding principles, and demonstrate how projects were selected for their contribution to the vision.

Break

Vision for the 1999 Learning Community Meeting.
Present the vision for the meeting in Buenos Aires. Build bridges across the region; influence the development of the field of non profit management education in Latin America.

Questions and discussion.

12:30 – 2:00 p.m.

Luncheon buffet in hotel.

2:00 – 5:30 p.m.

Project updates in concurrent sessions.

7:45 p.m.

Board buses for Puerto Madero, the city's old port. Now renovated, Puerto Madero is one of Buenos Aires' most dynamic and modern neighborhoods. Riverfront boardwalk. Parrillada (grilled food). Casual.

Tuesday, October 5

7:30 – 8:30 a.m.

Breakfast buffet in hotel.

9:00 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

Connecting strategies.
Structured networking opportunities.

12:30 – 2:00 p.m.

Luncheon buffet in hotel.

2:00 – 5:00 p.m. Team Time.
Address a) past and future action steps and b) connecting strategies and bridges that are being built with other projects in the BBI, with Latin American programs, and/or with service targets in the project's locale, c) how projects are responding to the needs and interests of practice. Prepare report/presentation for Thursday afternoon.

Evening Open for networking.

Wednesday, October 6

7:30 – 8:30 a.m. Breakfast buffet in hotel.

9:00 – 10:00 a.m. Orientation to site visits: destinations include nonprofit organizations and higher education institutions.

10:00 a.m. Vans leave hotel.
12 site visits. Maximum 10 participants per site.

Lunch On site or at nearby restaurant.

Afternoon Site visits continue.

4:00 – 6:00 p.m. Re-convene at hotel for de-briefing and discussion.
Representatives of sites visited will also attend.

7:30 p.m. Buses leave hotel. Performance and dinner. Traditional Argentina music and dance.

Thursday, October 7

7:00 – 8:00 a.m. Breakfast buffet in hotel.

8:30 a.m. Buses leave for the Public Meeting at La Recoleta Cultural Center.

9:00 a.m. – noon Public Meeting.
Panels, presentations, discussion.
Increase awareness of nonprofit management programs in higher education in Latin America. Attended by university staff in Buenos Aires, representatives of nonprofit organizations, government officials, and media reporters.

Noon – 2:00 p.m. Lunch in La Recoleta Park.
Variety of restaurants and shops. Scenic park, historic Recoleta Cemetery (burial site of Eva Peron, presidents, political leaders, soldiers, authors, and ranchers), and the colonial church Nuestra Señora del Pilar.

2:00 – 4:00 p.m. Closing session.

Sobre a Fundação W.K. Kellogg

A Fundação W.K. Kellogg foi estabelecida em 1930. Suas atividades de programação giram em torno da visão comum de um mundo em que cada pessoa tem um valor em si própria, aceita responsabilidades consigo mesma, com sua família, comunidade e com o bem-estar da sociedade em geral, e tem a capacidade de ser produtiva e de ajudar na formação de famílias, instituições responsáveis e comunidades saudáveis.

Para que se atinja o maior impacto, a Fundação concentra suas doações em áreas específicas. Estas incluem: saúde; sistemas alimentários e desenvolvimento rural; juventude, educação e educação superior; e filantropia e voluntariado. Quando relacionadas à estas áreas, fundos também são fornecidos à liderança; sistemas de informação e tecnologia; esforços para capitalizar em diversidade; e programas de desenvolvimento comunitário nos âmbitos social e econômico. As doações estão concentradas nos Estados Unidos, América Latina e Caribe, e nos países africanos de Botswana, Lesoto, Moçambique, África do Sul, Swazilândia e Zimbábue.

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Para alcanzar el mayor impacto posible, la Fundación concentra sus donaciones en áreas específicas. Estas incluyen: salud; sistemas alimentarios y desarrollo rural; juventud, educación y educación superior; filantropía y voluntariado. Cuando se hallan relacionadas con estas áreas, también se realizan donaciones en las áreas de liderazgo; sistemas de información y tecnología; esfuerzos para capitalizar en la diversidad; y en programas de desarrollo comunitario a escala social y económica. Las donaciones se concentran en los Estados Unidos, América Latina y el Caribe, y los países de sudafricanos de Botswana, Lesoto, Mozambique, Sudáfrica, Swazilândia y Zimbábue.

About the W. K Kellogg Foundation

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation was established in 1930. Its programming activities center around the common vision of a world in which each person has a sense of worth; accepts responsibility for self, family, community, and societal well-being; and has the capacity to be productive, and to help created nurturing families, responsive institutions, and healthy communities.

To achieve the greatest impact, the Foundation targets its grants toward specific areas. These include: health; food systems and rural development; youth and education and higher education; and philanthropy and volunteerism. When related to these areas, funding also is provided for leadership; information systems/technology; efforts to capitalize on diversity; and social and economic community development programming. Grants are concentrated in the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the southern African countries of Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe.