Why the Centrality of Community?

For the Race and Pedagogy Institute, the complex sets of situated spaces and social relations signified by the concept of community is central to the imagination and instantiation of our work. Especially for liberal arts institutions like Puget Sound, engagement with communities is an immanent and historical priority. RPI’s community engagement is grounded in an acknowledged debt that educational institutions owe to communities long exploited for their resources and long excluded from the project of exploring, remaking, producing, and applying knowledge. New community engagements, in the name of addressing responsibility and relevance, must focus on redress for this wrongdoing, especially where the knowledge produced has been used to exclude the members of beleaguered communities from the terms of what it means to be human. RPI’s Community Partners Forum, formed in December 2005, is at the pivot of our pursuit of this kind of necessary engagement. This is a coalition of individuals and organizations representing a broad spectrum of the Puget Sound who have forged ways to come together in partnership with the university to discuss, plan, and execute strategic action on a range of issues. Pedagogically, the Forum has become a site for convening, connecting, and amplifying voices that bring to the academy different and new interests, questions, and avenues of investigation, making possible the breaching and re-arranging of conventional boundaries and interactions of formal and non-formal educational institutions and spaces. The Institute’s grounding in critical community partnership enables Puget Sound to create, sustain, and learn from relationships and dialogue across higher education, K-12 education, artists, community educators, families, civic organizations, activists, and other constituencies.