Community-university research partnership structures: Approaches to understanding their impact

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Introduction

Higher education is the place to foster a critical consciousness and commitment to social change (Hurtado, 2008, p. 277).

Higher education institutions and communities are learning with and from each other in partnership, as they foster new ways of working together, create new knowledge, and strive to tackle complex societal issues such as poverty, education, health and well-being, safety and violence, environmental sustainability and food and water security, which affect both marginalised and mainstream populations. Central to their collaboration is the work of community-university research partnership structures, which build, advocate, facilitate, encourage and support community-engaged research partnerships between academic scholars and community practitioners. When university researchers engage in research partnerships with community groups and organisations, collectively they create a shift from knowledge transfer to knowledge exchange and move toward creating new knowledge by generating, mobilising and utilising knowledge in partnership. Hall (2009) proposes that “a modest shift in the institutional gaze … along with some imaginative partnership structures, could have a significant impact on current community issues, such as homelessness, food security and Aboriginal health and education” (p.39). Furthermore, “in communities where institutions of higher education exist, the collective resources of these universities and colleges (students, academic staff, facilities, research funding, knowledge skills, and capacities to facilitate learning) represent our largest accessible, available, and underutilized resource for community change and sustainability.” (Hall, 2009, p. 13). Similarly, Laing and Maddison (2007, p. 13) stress that “if … we push rather hard at the idea of widening participation in higher education, of widening access to the resources which universities possess, rather than only access to existing

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courses, some different possibilities emerge – especially as we significantly change the angle of our vision." It is unlikely that university policies and funding, which do not go beyond simple university presence in a community will have any positive knowledge impact on the viability of the community within which the campus resides (Garlick and Langworthy, 2008).

In certain higher education institutions and community and civil society organisations, efforts to create social change and positive impact have given rise to community-university research partnership structures; for the inter-related nature and complexities of issues and challenges faced by local communities, regions and nations require systematic partnership, collaboration and networking between and across all sectors and disciplines (Global Alliance on Community Engaged Research, 2009). Community-university research partnerships are one of several ways in which universities and communities collaborate for mutual benefit, in the context of research, with the aim of addressing challenges within the community and society (Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada, 2008). There is a responsibility of place within these partnership structures that seek to work within local and regional communities while extending and partnering nationally and internationally. These collaborative working relationships have the potential to influence both policy and practice locally and beyond. This article investigates forms and functions of community-university research partnership structures, approaches to research and scholarship that inform their work and the unique type of knowledge created through these organisational structures. It argues for the value and need to assess the impact of community-university research partnership structures, with particular focus on the Office of Community-Based Research at the University of Victoria as one case of such a structure. The conceptual framework of assessment as praxis is proposed to inform methods of inquiry, design and facilitation of a study of the impact of community-university research partnership structures, using participatory research approaches congruent with the values and principles of these structures themselves. The role of community-university research partnership structures is an important one, seeking to impact and transform the way higher education and communities work together, furthering the democratisation of knowledge within and across our societies and creating social change. It is a dance of change and impact.

Form and Function

An increasing number of universities such as the University of Victoria, Canada, and the University of Brighton, England, have committed to supporting community-

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university partnerships in their Strategic and Corporate plan, through policy and funding. They have also extended their commitment through their respective innovative institutional support structures for community-university research partnerships: the Office of Community-Based Research (University of Victoria) and the Community-University Partnership Programme (University of Brighton). The goals and activities of these institutional community-university research partnership support structures include: facilitating the process of widening participation, addressing social and economic inequity, funding, policy and ethical concerns, innovation and design in teaching, research and curriculum, facilitating working relationships between the community and university and serving as access points for “all citizens and all social groups … to access the intellectual capital, the resources … and the learning networks which are at the heart of what makes a university” (Laing and Maddison, 2007, p. 13). Support structures take several different forms and have the potential to influence societal and systemic change through their impact on policy and practice, contributing to the public good at local, regional, national and international levels.

Four broad categories of community-university partnerships in research have been identified to date (Hall, 2009).

- Type one involves individual faculties engaging in partnership with community without systematic institutional support. For example, there are higher education institutions within which there are no organisational structures to support faculty, community members, groups and organisations that work together in research partnerships. These partnerships may be scattered across the institution; those involved can become isolated in their efforts and may develop informal supportive groups.
- Type two describes centres or institutes with particular foci that support partnerships with communities having similar interests. For example, the Centre for Community Based Research (CCBR), an independent, non-profit organisation, located in Ontario, Canada, believes in and acts upon the power of knowledge, using participatory approaches to mobilise and collaborate with community members, marginalized groups, community organizations, government ministries, social and health services, and educational institutions; with the purpose to impact positive social change.
- Type three identifies systematic organisational structures functioning within a university to intentionally engage university and community partners in research for mutual benefit. The Office of Community-Based Research (OCBR)

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at the University of Victoria and the Community-University Partnership Programme (Cupp) at the University of Brighton are two examples among a growing number of systematic organisational structures that operate within higher education institutions.
- Type four involves multiple higher education institutions and community partnerships engaging in ongoing research and strengthening engaged teaching and research at regional, national or international levels. A current example within this category of community-university research partnerships is a global participatory research project, funded by the Social Science and Humanity Research Council and the International Development Research Centre, focusing on strengthening community-university research partnerships for sustainable development. This research project involves multiple higher education institutions and community partnerships engaging in research and strengthening engaged teaching and research. Partners in research are members of the Global Alliance on Community Engaged Research (GACER); they include: the Society for Participatory Research in Asia; the Living Knowledge Network; the Sub-Saharan Africa Participatory Research Network; Community-University Partnership Programme (University of Brighton), University of Victoria, University of Quebec in Montreal and Carleton University.

A critical function of institutional support structures for community-university research partnerships, such as the Office of Community-Based Research at the University of Victoria (OCBR) and the Community University Partnership Programme at the University of Brighton (CUPP), is to build, advocate, facilitate, encourage and support community-engaged research partnerships between academic scholars and community practitioners. Such partnerships create, generate and produce knowledge collaboratively; according to Hart, Maddison and Wolff (2007, p. 6) “despite our very different traditions of knowledge production in Cupp, academics and community practitioners have managed to merge expertise to produce forms of knowledge together.” Community practitioners, community scholars and academic scholars, act as social change agents as we partner, engaging together in research, scholarship and practice from different traditions of knowledge, offering different approaches and ways of working. These partnerships and the structures that support them, direct us to ask and answer core questions, such as the following: What is research? Who is it for? Who is it about? To whom does it matter? To what end does it serve? Who is included and excluded in various stages of the research process and in what capacity? Who owns knowledge? Who is credited with existing and new knowledge created? Such questions were foundational to Freire throughout

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his life, as reflected in his seminal publications, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1996a) and Pedagogy of Hope (Freire, 1996b). These questions challenge the practices of conventional scholarship and research conducted ‘upon’ instead of ‘with’ communities (Freire, 1996a) and call for community engaged scholarship approaches to research.

Research and Scholarship

Institutional ethnographers Campbell & Gregor (2002) challenge conventional notions of researchers as being positionless, of research being conducted to generate objective knowledge and that power imbalances between the researcher and so-called, ‘subjects’ are inherent in the research process. Such conventional approaches to research reflect colonial attitudes and ways of working (Asad, 1973). Researchers rooted in the mentality of the colonial power structure, parachute in and out of communities, harvesting knowledge and experiences from others, and assume sole ownership and credit through publication. Many engaged and community-engaged practitioners and scholars who challenge the mentality and practices of the colonial power structure from inside and outside higher education institutions were formerly traditional research ‘subjects’, such as women, and the diaspora of [1]Majority World people and their allies. These groups work to structure, facilitate, collaborate and provide scaffolding for mobilizing knowledge between each other, organisations, institutions, and governing structures.

Engaged scholarship draws from participatory research approaches such as community-based research and participatory action research, which are rooted in the co-creation of knowledge and ways of working collaboratively toward the goal of social change (Bringle, Games, & Malloy, 1999). Engaged scholarship rooted in the community can be referred to as community-engaged scholarship. Researchers position themselves with community members and within the community, to create knowledge, and work toward transformation and social justice (Strand, Cutforth, Stoecker, Marullo and Donahue 2003; Hall 2009). Their position is rooted in collaborative research, valuing different ways of knowing and different types of expertise. Community-engaged scholarship is the “teaching, discovery, integration, application and engagement that involves the faculty member in a mutually beneficial partnership with the community and has the following characteristics: clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, reflective critique, rigor and peer-review” (Gelmon, Seifer, Kauper-Brown and Mikkelson, 2005, p. 1).

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Participatory research approaches have not been traditionally associated with higher education. Freire and his colleagues conducted literacy work within the context of culture circles, in communities with non-literate populations. Engaging in the ongoing cycle of critical reflection and action; the need to 'cognise' and re-cognise' what was accepted and labelled as the status quo and/or culture within the teaching, learning and research contexts environments (Freire, 1996b); they brought to the fore the need for a participatory action approach that started with the "knowledge of living experience" (Freire, 1996b, p. 26), in other words, popular knowledge. Participatory action research and community-based research have been conducted by civil society organisations, Aboriginal communities, rural communities particularly across the majority world, by feminist and racial minority scholars, practitioners, and those whose knowledge can be referred to as popular knowledge. These populations have been deemed marginalized by mainstream society and academia. Recognition, validation and inclusion of the knowledge of these populations and their many different approaches to the process of knowledge creation and the democratisation of knowledge, transforms the research process to become more inclusive and democratic. The use of popular knowledge serves as knowledge for practice and makes knowledge more accessible and democratic, contributing to social action, social change and policy change. Within the context of community-university research partnerships, community-based research, institutional ethnography, participatory action research and other participatory research approaches are facilitated, supported, validated and legitimised through systematic organisational structures serving to reform and transform both scholarship and practice inside and outside of the institution.

Approaching Assessment as Praxis

As beings of praxis, we engage in a process of transformation (Freire, 1996a, p. 106). At the core this is "human activity – action and reflection, it is praxis; it is transformation of the world." (Freire, 1996a, p. 106). I propose assessment as praxis as a co-constructive and co-creative process that develops critical consciousness through 'reading the word' and 'reading the world' (Freire, 1996a). Assessment as praxis embeds the action of critical reflection and critical dialogue into all aspects and stages of assessment, from entry point through the research process and through the iterative cycle of ongoing implementation, research, action and reflection. Assessment as praxis is the overarching conceptual framework informing the methods of inquiry, design and facilitation of this proposed study of the impact of community-university research partnership structures that will

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combine and integrate participatory research approaches congruent with the values and principles of these structures.

Marullo et al. offer a community-based research model that supports assessment as a critical feedback loop that begins with and continuously shapes the social change initiative and the assessment work for the betterment of those who are marginalised (Marullo et al., 2003). They describe the assessment as being:

> … analogous to a reflective process through which social change actors and advocates articulate their change goals and formulate the criteria with which they will evaluate the successes and failures of change efforts. This in turn guides the actors in rethinking their change efforts, influencing whether and how their further efforts should be modified (p. 58).

Considerations offered by those engaging in assessment cycles derived from the community-based research model include: the seemingly unlimited variables that are at work in the process requiring community and university partners to establish focal points and priorities; the difference in status and power between partners and the way their respective world view and ways of knowing are validated or invalidated; and a shared understanding that marginalised groups have unique and valid understandings of power relations within institutions and how they maintain injustice and inequity through their status quo and work to promote social change through social justice and equity.

This study proposes that it is valuable and necessary to assess and understand the impact of community-university research partnerships and the organisational structures that support them. In this way, universities and communities can begin to determine the outcome of their intentions, indications of their respective contributions, roles and ways of working together to mobilise, generate and co-create knowledge and their impact across the university and community; extending practice, policy, and contributing to the public good at the local, regional, national and international levels. Impact assessment is by no means a new phenomenon, it is intuitively integrated into our daily lives. Impact is often considered an abstract concept until it is consciously and intentionally concretised through a process involving indications of impact and assessment tools to demonstrate and identify impact. A working definition of impact assessment that emerged through consultation and case studies is offered by Chris Roche (1999) in his book, *Impact*

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Assessment for Development Agencies as: “the systematic analysis of the lasting or significant changes – positive or negative, intended or not – in people’s lives brought about by a given action or series of actions” (p. 20). It is important to keep in mind, throughout the design of this study that the lines between outcomes and impact are not distinct; these concepts overlap.

Given the goal of democratising knowledge creation and validating multiple sources of knowledge as a primary purpose of engaged research approaches such as community-based research and participatory research (Hall, 2009), it is essential that the knowledge and methodological stances taken by this research study be congruent. In other words, the way knowledge is understood and represented as well as the ways in which the study is designed, need to acknowledge multiple sources of knowledge and different world views (ways of seeing and knowing the world). Participatory research principles such as reciprocity, shared knowledge creation and shared democratic outcomes informing social change (McGregor, Clover, Sanford and Krawetz, 2008) are foundational to the following engaged research methods, a combination of which will be used in this study, yet to be consolidated: institutional ethnography, case study inquiry and participatory research. The particular intersectional combination of these methods of inquiry as they relate to the design of an impact framework is expected to offer a new way to approach measuring the impact of a systematic organisational structure operating within a higher education institution.

Such engaged scholarship involves researchers attending to their own research stance, and beginning the research process from the everyday life of a particular person or group (Smith, 2005). Institutional ethnography is theorized and its research design developed in such a manner as to produce an analysis in the interest of those about whom knowledge is being constructed (Campbell and Gregor, 2002). Since institutional ethnography is interested in those about whom knowledge is being constructed, the entry point of the study builds accounts of their situation, what they are experiencing, their social and institutional relations and relations that rule them; it is their experiences that define and guide the researcher’s steps (Smith, 2005). An inquiry starts with what actually happens as those who live knowledge creation experience it and talk about it (Smith, 2005; Campbell and Gregor, 2002). According to Smith, “their concerns are explicated by the researcher in talking with them and thus set the direction of inquiry” (Smith, 2005). The entry point of this study can be characterised in a similar way.

The entry point of this study began through a conversation and mutual interest in

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the study of impact, between myself and the Director of the Office of Community-Based Research (OCBR) at the University of Victoria during a course and institute on community-based research attended by participants from higher education and members of local, regional and provincial communities. Discussions then extended with the OCBR full-time and contract staff; and the steering committee about a possible impact study. I was invited to spend time attending workshops, short and long term planning meetings, community-university initiatives, seminars, steering committee meetings, institutes, conferences and courses directly and indirectly related to the work of the OCBR. Concurrently, I explored the literature of community engagement, community-university research partnerships and the literature of assessing these partnerships. It became apparent that the field of assessing partnership structures is an emergent one and developing the tools to assess the impact of community-university research partnership structures is a timely challenge across institutional and community based structures. There has been strong interest and support from the people who participate in the daily work and guidance of the OCBR; all agree on the value of this study and a collective commitment was collaboratively formalised by recognising, in the OCBR 2010-2013 Service Plan, that a combination of evaluation tools is needed to address the impact of the work being conducted in and through the Office.

This entry point facilitated opportunities to begin to foster positive relations and a level of trust, which is unlike the role of an external evaluator;“strong relationships of trust, nurtured from the inception of a project, are the backbone for ongoing negotiation of ethical practice in partnership research” (Ball, 2008, p. 11). Maintaining good relations, trust and respect are critical values in community-university research partnerships, in the work of the OCBR and in the engaged research approaches of this study. Such collaboration and agreement has contributed to positive interactions and an understanding that participatory approaches were to be explored to fit with the collaborative culture of the OCBR. Using the terms participatory action research and participatory research, interchangeably, Hall states that “participatory research, is a proposal for action that focuses on transformed understandings of the creation of knowledge among human beings” (Hall, 2005, p. 21). Co-creating, co-generating, co-producing knowledge and the ethical use of knowledge reflect the core research principles of community-based research and participatory research. These principles are central to the work of institutional support structures for community-university research partnerships such as the OCBR.

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Community-based research, from a university perspective, provides opportunities for community scholars, practitioners and university researchers to use their collective academic, scientific, experiential and on-the-ground knowledge in a process of co-creation, exchange and mobilisation, to address community and societal needs. In this way, the theory and practice of community-based research is merged with the theory and practice of knowledge mobilisation, creation and democratisation thereby engaging in research as a co-constructive and co-creative process. The fact that there has been an active Office of Community-Based Research (OCBR) at the University of Victoria for the past three years is one indicator that a shift is occurring, reflecting a systematic approach to community-university research partnerships and the institutionalising of community-based research. Through institutional support structures such as the OCBR, community-based research is receiving increased recognition by researchers as a valid and legitimate approach to the co-creation and mobilisation of knowledge.

Drawing from the definition of community-based research by Strand, Cutforth, Stoecker, Marullo and Donahue (2003), the OCBR frames community-based research in its university context as:

a way of integrating research and teaching, an opportunity for experimental learning in real-world settings, as a contribution to recruitment through the creation of a dynamic and engaged atmosphere, a means of making our region a better place to live and as a contribution to national and global understanding of ways in which the creation and co-creation of knowledge are used for social innovation (OCBR Service plan, October 2009, p. 4).

The Office of Community-Based Research fits into the type three category of community-university research partnerships. Created in 2007, after two years of formal planning and proposal stages, it bridges the community and institution cultures of knowledge-making, research, scholarship and practice. It is a vital part of the University of Victoria’s commitment to community engagement and community-engaged scholarship. This systematic organisational structure is physically located within the University, with the purpose to support, facilitate and engage with university and community partners in research. The work of the OCBR aims to: support, promote and validate research approaches, ways of knowing and multiple types of knowledge used by historically marginalised populations; facilitate the process of inclusive knowledge creation; reform research methods used within the

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context of the university to become a more inclusive and democratic process; and contribute to social action, social change informing policy within its local and regional communities and extending across national and international communities.

The OCBR is designed to “support community engagement and research to create vibrant, sustainable and inclusive communities.” (www.uvic.ca/ocbr). This mission statement begs the question: How will we know what kind of impact community engagement and research are making toward creating vibrant, sustainable and inclusive communities? Using an assessment lens, this mandate elicits the following questions: What kind of impact are community-university research partnerships making toward creating vibrant, sustainable and inclusive communities? How does the OCBR add value to what community-based researchers have already been doing? What difference does the OCBR make to the institution and to community stakeholders? These are the broad research questions that inform inquiry and investigation into the impact of the OCBR and the co-construction of an impact assessment framework to be used and revised in the short and long-term. The OCBR is a particular example of an institutional community-university research partnership structure. The work and impact of the OCBR will be documented in a case study. Stoecker (1991) argues that case studies “help define abstract concepts [and] provide concrete illustrations of those concepts” (p. 108). Impact is often considered an abstract concept until it is consciously and intentionally concretised through a process involving indications of impact and assessment tools to demonstrate and identify impact.

A case study inquiry provides us with one way to intentionally concretise concepts such as impact and knowledge creation within the context of systematic organisational structures that facilitate and support community-university research partnership. The “most useful case studies may be those which start with a community problem and work collaboratively with the community on that problem (Stoecker, 1991, p. 108). Although the methodology of this study itself does not start with a problem in the community outside of the university, the idea for the study was initiated through collaboration and discussion within the context of the Office of Community-Based Research. Representatives from these groups will be involved as participants in the study in various capacities to use their collective academic, scientific, experiential and on-the-ground knowledge in a process of co-creation, exchange and mobilisation, to address the impact of the OCBR and to collaborate on the design of an impact assessment for this and other similar structures. Since it is the impact of a systematic institutional support structure that

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is under study, it is critical to discover how people's activities are coordinated within and around this structure so that the impact can be recognised.

"Discovering *beyond any one individual's experience* including the researcher's own and putting into words supplemented in some instances by diagrams or maps what she or he discovers about how people's activities are coordinated" (Smith, 2006, p. 1) is one of the aims of institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry. It is the key intersection between institutional ethnography, which problematises our understanding of power-knowledge relationships, and the aim of making visible the impact of the work of the Office of Community-Based Research (OCBR) to transform power-knowledge relations, that makes this method of inquiry highly applicable to this study. Impact can be relatively invisible, if not explicitly addressed and assessed. Explicating power-knowledge relations means that these relations and processes will be unfolded, analysed and layers of obscurity will be peeled back. It is a problem-posing process.

Literature: Knowledge Creation and Impact

Knowledge creation is essentially the role of research, the work of the university and its systematic structures. The literature reflects agreement that community-university research partnerships and engaged scholarship methods of research contribute to knowledge creation. Therefore, it is likely that one of the impacts of the OCBR is knowledge creation. It can be argued that the type of knowledge and how such knowledge is created, mobilised and legitimised through community-university research partnership structures, such as the OCBR, differ from or are a combination of four modes of knowledge. Two modes of knowledge are classified by Gibbons et al. (1994) and two modes of knowledge are classified by Scott et al. (2004) in their respective papers. Hart, Maddison and Wolff (2007), summarise and link these four modes of knowledge in the following way:

Mode 1 (Gibbons et al.) is usually exclusive to the knowledge generated in universities. It is disciplinary, expert-led, hierarchical, peer-reviewed, and offers legitimacy and prestige.

Mode 2 knowledge (Gibbons et al.) "has not traditionally been valued by academics and by institutions of higher education" (Hart, Maddison and Wolff, 2007, p. 5). It is applied, problem-centred, transdisciplinary, heterogeneous and network-embedded knowledge.

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Mode 3 (Scott et al.) is ‘dispositional and transdisciplinary knowledge’ having its context in structured university work, specifically at the postgraduate level.

Mode 4 knowledge (Scott et al.) has more of a conceptual nature with the purpose of being political and change-orientated.

Having identified aspects of the type of knowledge created through Cupp in each of the four modes, Hart, Maddison and Wolff (2007) created a fifth mode by combining and adding to the classifications of Gibbons et al. and Scott et al. Mode 5 knowledge is peer-reviewed, applied, heterogeneous, problem-centred, transdisciplinary, change-orientated and co-produced by the university and community (Hart, Maddison and Wolff, 2007).

One approach in undertaking this case study is to begin to identify types of knowledge created, generated and produced. Relevance to a study of the impact of the OCBR means asking the questions: What types of knowledge are created, generated and mobilised by the OCBR? and What is the impact of these types of knowledge? Furthermore, to what end and for whose purpose are these types of knowledge created? If the impact of knowledge creation in an organisational context such as the OCBR, is to be illustrated and assessed, then evidence concretising the OCBR’s organisational knowledge creation will have to be produced. This will involve more than the sum of the knowledge created by the individual community-university partnerships. Therefore, both a theoretical and practical understanding of organisational knowledge creation is essential.

Ikujiro Nonaka deconstructs the ontological dimension of knowledge creation in the following way: “Although ideas are formed in the minds of individuals, interaction between individuals typically plays a critical role in developing these ideas (Nonaka, 1994). In other words, communities of interaction contribute to the amplification and development of new knowledge. While these communities might span departmental or organizational boundaries, the point to note is that they define a further dimension to organizational knowledge creation, which is associated with the extent of social interaction between individuals that share and develop knowledge” (Nonaka, 1994). Community-university research partnerships are ‘communities of interaction’ that are connected to, and interconnected with, other communities of interaction. Inter-organisational partnerships such as the OCBR’s collaboration with United Way Victoria, intersect multiple communities of interaction across institutional and organisational boundaries, likely with ripple-effect impact. The Community-University Partnership Programme (Cupp) at the University of

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Brighton, use the term ‘Communities of Practice’ to describe their community-university research partnerships. Communities of practice refer to “groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise” (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 139). This definition challenges the boundaries between experts and non–experts, encourages work across organisational and disciplinary boundaries and runs counter to the structures and hierarchies often created and generated by higher education institutions.

The terms, ‘communities of interaction’ and ‘communities of practice’ can be used to frame a critical role of the OCBR as facilitating and creating constellations of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Figure 1 (below), is a generic representation of an organisation conceptualised as the Communities of Practice constellation (CoP constellation). It is described as follows:

The groups of individuals encircled with dotted lines represent six individual CoPs, and the figures overlapping two circles represent “boundary spanners” who hold membership in more than one CoP

and connect CoPs within organizations. CoPs that exist independently, with no boundary spanners or linkages to other CoPs within an organization, are depicted in circles with solid lines, and individuals without membership in any CoP are represented by the people icons standing outside all the circles of the organization (Gajda and Koliba, 1998, p. 34).

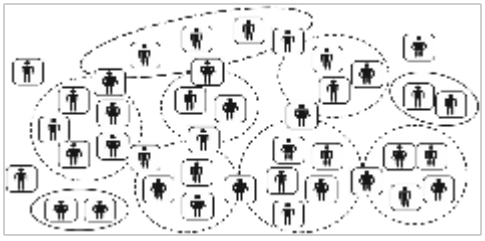


Figure 1: ‘Constellations of Communities of Practice’ (Phrase: Wenger, 1998; Diagram: Gajda & Koliba, 2007)

This method of mapping the CoP constellation may be applicable to an impact study since it may be re-designed to provide a visual representation of knowledge creation, knowledge exchange, and other concepts and realities within and between communities of practice and communities of interaction. This representation can be

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used to demonstrate “a dynamic and interconnected web of interpersonal collaboration through cycles of inquiry” (Gajda and Koliba, 2007, p. 34). OCBR’s role to equip and support engaged and traditional scholars in their teaching, research and community engagement, as well as equipping scholars, potential scholars and practitioners outside the context of higher education, referred to as ‘the community’; provides spaces for these communities of interaction to create knowledge. “Organizational knowledge creation, therefore, should be understood in terms of a process that ‘organizationally’ amplifies the knowledge created by individuals, and crystallizes it as a part of the knowledge network of organization” (Nonaka, 1994, p. 17). It can be argued that the type of knowledge created through the OCBR extends beyond the knowledge network of the organisation of the OCBR, of the University of Victoria, of the United Way (example of an OCBR organisation research partner) and into communities and the larger society. Developing the tools to evidence and assess the extent of OCBR’s organisational knowledge creation is a necessary challenge requiring the involvement of those who engage in the work of organisational knowledge creation within the university and community.

Assessment Challenge

A common quote by Albert Einstein states that, “Not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted.”This statement begs the question, “Who determines what is countable and what counts?” Questions such as this one are common in the literature of assessing community-university research partnerships of all types and challenge partners who work in the community and within higher education. An emergent field, the challenge of assessing and demonstrating impact of type three community-university research partnership structures, i.e. organisational structures functioning within a university to intentionally engage university and community partners in research for mutual benefit, is being tackled within the university and within the community. The literature offers ways of working through some of the assessment challenges.

Community-university research partnerships intend to be collaborative and action-oriented (Rubin, 2000); these objectives create challenges when assessing success on the basis of outcomes and impact (Watson, 2007). Many partnership projects are vulnerable to shifts in resource and funding allocation resulting from changes in external priorities and policies. The potential for such directional changes increase interest by both university and community partners to create strategies for developing sustainable partnerships. Measuring and documenting impact can

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contribute greatly to this goal (Suarez-Balcazar, Harper & Lewis, 2005). Measures which are relatively easy to implement are attractive since they meet the reality to be accountable within short timelines. Langworthy asks a key question in the context of this reality, “Do these measures indicate what really matters and is the process enabling universities to improve and progress?” (Langworthy, 2007). According to Langworthy’s (2007) review of international approaches such as those developed by Charles & Benneworth, 2001; Gelmon et al., 2001; Kellogg Commission, 1999, assessments of community and/or regional engagement conducted by universities, take the form of either a guided self-evaluation assessment with expert peer review and iterative agreement; a metric assessment based on an agreed schedule of measures; or a combination of both. These three types of assessments tend to be longitudinal thereby focusing on the process of engagement rather than the outcomes of engagement.

Outcomes of engagement can be described as achievements such as improved relationships, greater trust and increased confidence in higher education (Pearce, Pearson and Cameron, 2007). As such, measurement becomes particularly problematic, it is an “ongoing challenge to find innovative solutions to the complexities of evaluating and demonstrating the impact of this kind of work [community-university research partnerships” (Hart & Wolff, 2007, p. 196). An example of how to tackle such challenges can be gleaned from the work at the Community-University Partnership Programme, the community-university research partnership structure at the University of Brighton. Cupp has risen to this challenge through their recent evaluations, in three stages, including an impact survey as the final stage, conducted by an external evaluator (Roker, 2005, 2006 & 2007). These were relatively small scale studies focusing on key success criteria of Cupp’s projects, activities and experiences. Some of their findings included Cupp’s critical role in creating links between community and university to facilitate both networking and learning, such as their Helpdesk and other access points to the university; and provision of resources, funding and technical support partnerships. These findings contribute to the process of demonstrating Cupp’s value and impact within both the university and community as a community-university research partnership structure with an organisational infrastructure. Cupp continues to document their assessment process and findings. They have provided relatively open access through many available papers and publications available online and through their online sharing network, where it is possible for dialogue from participants to shape the research, practice and learning process. Such access is congruent with the democratisation of knowledge that is the core of community-

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university research partnerships and the structures that support them.

Conclusion

Community-university research partnership structures of all types engage within the context of organisations to work toward co-creating knowledge and co-producing policy and practice. Methods of research and inquiry such as community-based research, participatory research, and institutional ethnography are mechanisms for the multi-disciplinary co-creation and mobilisation of knowledge to collaboratively deal with inter-related social issues that affect the social, economic and environmental conditions of people and their communities. Such partnership research “has emerged as an approach that is particularly well-suited to learning new ways of conducting research that avoid the expert-subject dichotomies and de-contextualization often associated with ‘lone-star’ research conceived and conducted solely by academics” (Ball, 2008. p. 7). It is within various types of partnership structures that different ways of knowing and different traditions of knowledge and expertise are actively valued. Knowledge is mobilised, synergised and created by “starting with the knowledge of experience had in order to get beyond it is not staying in that knowledge” (Freire, 1996b, p. 70).

Assessing the impact of community-university research partnership structures is an ongoing challenge faced by higher education. For example, one common aspect of their community engagement mission statements, shared by many higher education institutions, state the role of research as being of benefit for society. One of our greatest challenges lie in assessing how such benefit is defined, how it’s achieved, who benefits and how the lives of people in sectors of society who are often excluded and oppressed, are impacted by higher education institutions engagement within these sectors. It is by approaching assessment as praxis, through congruent and collaborative design and implementation within the cycle of action and reflection, that assessment becomes an iterative process generated by those who work in and with community-university partnerships and their support structures. Such a process congruent with the form, function and purpose of community-university research partnership structures has great potential to contribute to the co-creation and democratisation of knowledge through an authentic process; producing valuable tools to benefit all participants and contributing to the transformation of structures, systems and society.

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Notes

[1]In the 1990’s, Bangladeshi photojournalist/activist, Dr. Shahidul Alam began advocating use of the term Majority World, instead of the commonly used «Third World’ or ‘Developing Countries’. He is a ‘partnership’ thinker and activist who speaks and writes about the continued existence of colonial power structures. I have added ‘the diaspora’ to his term Majority World because it includes people like me who migrate from the Majority World to the Western World. My ancestors and I were born in different Majority World countries. Even though I have lived in Western society for most of my life and self-identify as Canadian, this is not how I am perceived, since the colour of my skin, certain values, knowledge traditions and ways of thinking are referents to a non-Western place.

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