Articles

Creating a Common Space for Community Engagement

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Abstract

The increased interest in community engagement within higher education provides new opportunities for examining the role of university continuing education (UCE) units in relation to their participation in community-university partnerships. This article is based on findings from a qualitative study that used a social theory lens to examine the perspectives and ideas of representatives from the university and the community relating to their experiences and interests in participating in collaborations in support of the social good. While the respondents from community-based research and community organizations identified few constraints affecting their involvement in these kinds of partnerships, the UCE study participants described a number of issues that affected their participation, such as an emphasis on revenue generation and the lack of organizational support for engagement. Considerations for supporting a common space for engagement involving UCE professionals include the development of a partnership model, the adoption of an asset-based

Résumé

L'intérêt accru en matière de mobilisation communautaire au sein de l'enseignement supérieur offre de nouvelles occasions pour étudier le rôle des unités d'éducation permanente dans les université (EPU) relativement à leur participation à des partenariats communautaires-universitaires. Cet article se fonde sur des découvertes provenant d'une étude qualitative qui a utilisé l'objectif d'une théorie sociologique pour examiner les perspectives et les idées de représentants universitaires et communautaires en lien avec leurs expériences et leurs intérêts dans la participation de collaborations qui soutiennent le bien collectif. Bien que les répondants d'une recherche fondée sur la collectivité et les organismes communautaires aient identifié peu de contraintes touchant leur engagement dans de tels partenariats, les participants de l'étude sur l'EPU ont décrit quantité de problèmes qui ont eu des effets sur leur participation, comme l'emphase sur la production de recettes et le manque de soutien organisationnel pour la mobilisation. Les points à examiner pour soutenir un espace commun qui servira à la

approach, affiliations with national organiza-
tions and networks, seeking external visibility
and recognition, and using social theories to
guide the development of community engage-
ment practices.

mobilisation impliquant des professionnels de
l'EPU comprennent l'élaboration d'un modèle
de partenariat; l'adoption d'une approche
fondée sur la valeur des actifs; la recherche
d'une visibilité et d'une reconnaissance exté-
rieures, l'utilisation de théories sociales pour
guider la création de pratiques de mobilisation
communautaire et la création d'affiliations
avec des organismes et des réseaux nationaux.

Introduction

Universities and communities in many countries are actively developing or renewing their
commitments to work together to bridge economic and social goals and to help reframe the role
of higher education in society as both a business and a catalyst for social change. Boyer's belief
that higher education must serve the interests of the larger community through implementing
a shared vision that renews not only the university but also "society itself" (Boyer, 1990, p. 81)
has stimulated the development of ideas for a new conceptualization of engagement within
higher education that incorporates the notion that collaboration is necessary in order to address
complex social issues (Bruns, Fitzgerald, Furco, Sonka, & Swanson, 2011). The growing interest
in community engagement is evidenced through the creation of declarations and agreements as
well in the establishment of a range of community-based initiatives.

This article is based on a case study that identifies some of the experiences and issues
relating to the role of university continuing education (UCE) in community-university collabo-
rations within a Canadian context. In this study I examined the views of paid staff working
in community organizations and the views of UCE practitioners and faculty members at one
western Canadian university about their participation in a specific type of community engage-
ment activity: community-university partnerships.

I will first identify the support for community engagement and define the key terms used in
the study. This section is followed by a summary of the theoretical framework, methodology, and
findings. Then I outline five considerations for UCE's practice and provide concluding comments.

Background for the Support of
Community Engagement

Support for the development of engagement practices in higher education is evidenced in docu-
ments, community-university partnerships, and funding initiatives. The Kellogg Commission on
the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities in the United States was one of the first entities
to identify how higher education could collaborate with others in order to share knowledge and
expertise and create strong communities. Its report *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution*
(1999) offers five recommendations: the development of an engagement plan, incentives for faculty,
funding, encouraging interdisciplinary research, and making engagement critical to the mission of

the university. The purpose of these recommendations was to provide a way for universities and their communities to move from rhetoric to action through a "practical and achievable set of strategies" (Sandmann & Weerts, 2006, p. 4). In 2000, the Kellogg Commission issued another report, *Renewing the Covenant: Learning, Discovery, and Engagement in a New Age and Different World*. This report identified the need to improve access to public universities in the United States, achieve excellence in curricula, encourage participation in a democratic society, and ensure that programs and resources benefit the larger community through addressing social problems.

A few years later, university presidents from over 20 countries signed a declaration supporting the aims of community engagement. The Talloires Declaration outlines the responsibility of higher education in fostering a sense of social responsibility and serving and strengthening society through creating social capital (Talloires Network, 2005). Recently, a white paper on engagement in US public and land-grant universities written by members of the Council on Engagement and Outreach suggests that universities must find a way to ensure that engagement is a part of the mission and mandate of higher education so that there is a university-wide focus on outcomes that support positive societal change (Bruns et al., 2011).

In Europe, Australia, and Great Britain, community engagement approaches and strategies relate to the specific traditions and nature of civic society and public policy in each country as well as to the mandate of their universities. Throughout Europe, Science Shops have a distinct role in creating and sharing knowledge about human and social sciences as well as in technology and the natural sciences (Living Knowledge: The International Science Shop Network, 2008). In Australia and Great Britain, there is an emphasis on initiatives that support specific social and economic goals for the mutual benefit of universities and communities (Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance, 2006; Watson, 2003).

Community engagement in Canada gained momentum following the implementation of national funding programs supporting research partnerships and their infrastructure (Vaillancourt, 2006). Commencing in 1999, the government of Canada has funded community-university research projects as a vehicle for identifying and addressing societal problems at the local and regional level. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) identifies funding for engagement as a "key priority," indicating that engagement fosters interactions between and among public, private, and nongovernmental organizations, leading to "benefits for all Canadians" (SSHRC, 2012, n.p.). Other reports highlight the importance of community engagement initiatives because they strengthen the "collective capacity to solve current and anticipated problems, while contributing both to community development and to the advancement of the disciplines concerned" (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2008, p. 84).

Interest in the study of community engagement has also resulted in articles that examine the challenges of engaged scholarship (Furco, 2010; Hartley, Saltmarsh, & Clayton, 2010) and in research focusing on specific interests or approaches, such as healthy communities and service learning (Alperovitz & Howard, 2005; Hollander & Saltmarsh, 2000). While there are numerous studies focusing on specific issues and challenges within community-university partnerships, at the present time there are few studies that explore the unique engagement challenges and opportunities of university-based units such as continuing education within a Canadian context.

In a study about outreach and engagement in state and land-grant universities in the United States, McLean, Thompson, and Jonker (2006) claim that the discourse on engagement is well established but that the specific implementation strategies are not. Comparing the American engagement model with the work of Canadian UCEs, the authors suggest that the "outreach and engagement movement provides a window of opportunity for UCE units" to play a leadership role in facilitating and coordinating civic engagement (p. 103). Jackson (2010) believes that the dual community and university orientation of UCE provides opportunities for community

building and incubation projects and challenges practitioners working in UCE to support the social economy by developing educational programs and enterprises that combine theory and practice in social finance and community-based investing. In its academic plan the Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta has identified community engagement as a vehicle for supporting "social and individual betterment" through the development of initiatives such as a community-university engagement scholar-in-residence, publications relating to engaged scholarship, and community-university collaborations (University of Alberta, Faculty of Extension, 2009, p. 5).

Other studies identify the need to gain further understanding of UCE's role from the perspective of the public service mission and scholarly functions of the university (Thompson & Lamble, 2000) and call for research that addresses new approaches for integrating social justice into programming priorities (Cram & Morrison, 2005). Fletcher (2008) supports approaches that focus on social justice, recommending the incorporation of community-based participatory research partnerships within the practice of UCE. In earlier articles relating to the practice of UCE, Guinsburg (1996) advocates for collaboration rather than competitiveness and asserts that the profession needs to aim higher in order to support an efficient, effective, and ethical practice. Stern (1992) maintains that a successful activist must also be a successful entrepreneur: "without the first we lose our souls; without the second we lose our jobs" (p. 25). The idea that UCE practitioners can play a role in "building bridges" between faculty and community is offered by Lund (1994), who suggests that UCE is well positioned within the university to provide a forum for faculty and community members to "raise new questions, challenge academic assumptions, and stimulate thinking and reflection" (pp. 174–175).

These studies provide suggestions about the various roles that UCE practitioners can play in supporting the university's community engagement goals. The current interest in and commitment to civic engagement in higher education gives UCE units an opportunity to refocus their work within the university and "return to a situation in which they played a leadership role in facilitating their institution's coordinated engagement with community needs and aspirations" (McLean et al., 2006, p. 103). However, in order to reframe the work of UCE, more research is needed to align continuing education units more centrally within the institution's community engagement mission.

Definitions

A number of specific terms are used in this paper, relating to community-based collaborations and organizational units within the university. The definitions that follow are drawn from both community and academic sources.

Community engagement within the context of higher education refers to the collaboration between universities and their larger communities, whether local, national, or international, for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2006). The Kellogg Commission (1999) provides a seven-part test of engagement: responsiveness, respect for partners, academic neutrality, accessibility, integration, coordination, and resource partnerships. Some examples of community engagement are collaborative activities such as community-university partnerships, joint programs and workshops, and experiential learning in the community.

Community-university partnerships are forms of community engagement that involve specific partners from the community and university, have a defined starting point, and develop and build on a relationship for a common purpose or goal (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002).

The notion of *common space* provides a context for the development of collaborations. Drawing from the work of Habermas, Taylor describes common space as people coming "together in a common act of focus for whatever purpose" (2004, p. 85). For the purpose of this article, common space is the commitment to and participation in collaborations that support the social good.

University continuing education (UCE) is a unit located within the university that comprises individuals who are responsible for the organization of programs and services in response to community needs, as well as providing higher education access to learners through the development of programs that help to link the university and the community. UCE staff members are also involved with initiatives such as the delivery of credit and noncredit courses, consulting, engaging in applied research, providing customized training for professionals, and utilizing emerging technology in designing and delivering programs (Percival, 2001).

Community-based research (CBR) involves both academic faculty and community members in planning, implementing, and evaluating research projects. According to Israel, Schulz, Parker, and Becker (1998), the key principles of CBR include building on strengths and resources within the community; facilitating collaborative partnerships in all phases of the research; and promoting a colearning and empowering process that acknowledges and challenges social inequalities. Additionally, CBR involves a cyclical and iterative process and disseminates the findings and knowledge to all partners.

Community organizations (COs) are recognized entities that may utilize either a formal or an informal organizational structure in order to build capacity to engage diverse stakeholders, including residents and others, in sustained, collaborative, strategic efforts to strengthen and improve conditions in an identified geographic area (United Way of Greater Victoria, 2007).

Theoretical Perspective: Developing a Common Space for Community Engagement

In this article I incorporate the ideas of two contemporary social theorists, Juergen Habermas and Charles Taylor, in order to provide a framework for examining the opportunities, interests, and limitations affecting the development of community-university collaborations involving representatives from UCE, CBR, and COs. Both Habermas and Taylor acknowledge the importance of communication in creating a space for deliberative discourse and action in order to promote positive social change. Taylor suggests that common space is a flexible kind of space involving either an open exchange of small groups of individuals or a large number of people from different backgrounds and contexts who share similar perspectives or ideas (2004).

The notion of an active citizenry engaged in public discourse is a key assumption underlying Habermas's theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1987). The basic tenet of communicative action theory is that the purpose of all speech acts is to achieve mutual understanding and that all persons possess the desire and competence to accomplish this. Habermas maintains that rational public debate is required in order to address societal issues, including gaps between "enlightened self-interest and orientation to the common good" (1992, p. 49).

In communicative action theory, Habermas proposes a theoretical understanding of society that involves interactions by its members referred to as the *lifeworld,* as well as through political and economic exchanges known as the *system*. He maintains that the lifeworld functions primarily through communication and the action of individuals. In his view, "language and culture are constitutive for the lifeworld" (1987, p. 125). According to Habermas, the lifeworld involves the

development of shared understanding achieved through communication. For him, communicative action provides the means for gaining mutual understanding of issues, coordinates actions and contributes to social integration, and leads to the development of identity (1987).

A characteristic of the system is its ability to produce actions through interconnected means such as the economy. In the workplace, system influence is apparent through decision-making practices based on votes or balance sheets. According to Habermas, the system is extending further into the lifeworld primarily in capitalist societies where administrative and bureaucratic systems are increasingly imposing processes that threaten lifeworld traditions and beliefs (1992). In Habermas's view, when exchanges that are based on money and power become the norm, these kinds of interactions replace discourses that involve value-laden social interests, attacking cultural traditions and resulting in reduced opportunities for developing common understanding about issues of concern in society (1981; 1987).

Charles Taylor is a contemporary Canadian philosopher and political theorist whose perspectives support Habermas's assertions about the role of communication in discourse and problem solving. Taylor's notion of common space provides a way to conceptualize how groups of people from differing backgrounds express their shared interests and work together to influence social change. Taylor believes that common space is "a space where people come together and contact each other" (2004, p. 104). He argues that common space is becoming increasingly important in our world as a way to influence changes in society. He suggests that common space involving the larger public sphere offers a place where society comes "to a common mind about important matters" (2004, p. 87). While Habermas's analysis provides a structural framework for assessing perspectives and experiences, Taylor offers a flexible view of society, where members are capable of adopting new ideas and approaches.

An examination of community engagement using a social theory lens provides UCE professionals with an opportunity to assess their work within the university and to develop new approaches that support the institution's social-purpose mission. It also allows for the establishment of a new model to guide UCE's practice. The use of a social theory lens and specifically the concept of common space is one approach that can be used to gain improved understanding of the relationships between the community and the university within a context of partnerships that support the social good.

In this paper, I have combined the ideas of Habermas and Taylor in order to identify a framework for examining the perspectives of the respondents concerning their involvement in community-university partnerships. Within this framework, common space has the following characteristics:

- It would be recognized by group participants and by university and community members as a space for supporting social change.
- Group members involved in this space would establish norms that support discourse, the development of common understanding, and the resolution of conflicts.
- The outcomes would address social problems of concern to the larger community.

Methodology

This bounded case study used qualitative research methods and a theoretical perspective provided by social theory. The intended outcomes of the study were to gain further information about the issues and opportunities experienced by members of three specific professional groups involved in community-university collaborations for the social good and to identify the constraints and opportunities affecting continuing education's role in these partnerships. The

groups selected to participate in the study were UCE program administrators; university faculty who self-identified as being involved in community-based research (CBR); and paid staff from community-based nonprofit organizations (COs).

The UCE respondents identified their work experience as ranging from two to 26 years. Their volunteer or work experience focused on professional and personally driven interests including sports and cultural events or activities affiliated with their children's education. Current work activities centred on specific tasks concerning the development, administration, and evaluation of credit and noncredit courses and programs along with program or unit budgeting and learner support.

CBR respondents had five to 18 years of work experience. All the respondents identified interest and experience in community-university research partnerships. Most of the CBR respondents indicated that their continuing involvement in community-based boards and committees resulted primarily from their partnership experiences with local and international community organizations.

The CO respondents identified the duration of their work experience with the current employer as ranging from less than one year to over 17 years. All the CO respondents indicated they had a long-standing interest in and commitment to voluntary organizations.

Four research questions were developed to guide the study process. Three of the questions focused on clarifying the level of interest in collaborating for social change and identifying the major gaps, tensions, and opportunities. The final question addressed the role of UCE in community engagement. The relationship between the research questions, the theoretical framework, and related literature is shown in Table 1. As identified in this table, there are gaps in the literature relating to UCE's involvement in community-university partnerships with CBR and COs.

Five representatives from each professional group volunteered to participate in the study. Each participant responded to 15 open-ended questions during a face-to-face interview. In order to obtain information about participants' backgrounds, the initial questions focused on the length of time each had worked in the field and knowledge of the other areas of practice involved in the research study. Subsequent questions focused on each participant's current work role, experiences working in collaborative activities, ideas about collaborating with others, and suggestions about what types of outcomes may be achieved and how to achieve them. Members of the UCE group also completed an online survey identifying additional information about their knowledge, understanding, and experiences in UCE. The responses for each group and question were coded, analyzed, and compared with relevant supporting documents.

Findings

Overall, the respondents in this study supported the idea of working together, developing a common space for collaborations to share resources and expertise and generate outcomes for the benefit of society. However, analysis of the findings suggests there are a number of tensions that exist within community-university partnerships as well as factors that constrain the establishment of a common space for collaboration among members of the three groups.

The four areas of tensions identified by the study participants were resources/money, reciprocity, relationship building, and recognition of community-university partnerships (Table 2). These themes, described in more detail in the following paragraphs, reflected the individual experiences, ideas, and expectations of the study participants relating to the partnership experience.

Table 1: Relationship between the research questions, literature, and theoretical perspectives

Research Question	Literature	**Theoretical Perspective**
1. Is there interest in building common space to allow community organization (CO) representatives, persons involved in community-based research (CBR), and university continuing education (UCE) practitioners to collaborate in helping solve community problems?	Theoretical and empirical studies support the engagement role of the university in society. Examples of engagement vary based on local traditions and needs. The UCE literature identifies tensions between interests in social-justice-oriented programming and the current focus on vocational courses and services but no empirical research on partnerships involving both CBR and COs.	Taylor (2004) suggests that common space that involves the larger public sphere is important. He maintains common space provides for deliberative discourse about the things that matter in society.
2. If there is interest in building common space, what are the gaps and the tensions between the three groups?	Findings relating to community-university partnerships and studies on CBR suggest there are gaps and tensions involving resources, time, organizational support, money, roles, and types of outcomes but an interest in supporting initiatives for the social good.	Habermas (1987) provides a framework for understanding the desire for collaborative exchanges and analyzing conflicts.
3. Are there specific strategies that will develop and improve community-university collaborations within the context of community engagement?	The literature on community engagement suggests that effective strategies must relate to the specific context of the university and the local community.	A number of research articles identify that collaborative discussions and debate about values and desires are necessary for social change to occur.
4. What would be the role for UCE professionals and what issues or constraints could limit UCE's participation?	The literature identifies that the practice of UCE focuses on cost recovery programming but could become more involved in research and social justice.	The ideas of two social theorists offer ways for UCE to view its practice: Habermas (1987) provides a framework for understanding how money and power can colonize the lifeworld, resulting in tension and conflict and creating an impetus for societal change. Taylor (2004) submits that new forms of practice can emerge based on earlier practices.

Resources/Money

The responses from the UCE participants suggest there are conflicts relating to the life-world issues and needs within the partnership and the administrative system requirements related to achieving financial targets. Furthermore, the findings identify that the UCE respondents had different concerns about money than the CBR and CO participants. While professionals from CBR and COs were mindful of the financial resources needed for collaborations, members of these two groups were not required to generate revenues as a primary aspect of their work. The UCE study participants' responsibility for revenue generation within a competitive marketplace distinguished their responses from those of the other respondents. As one UCE respondent stated:

> We were all set to share with them . . . and then we looked at each other and thought . . . they are our competitors as well as our partners. These are products that we have developed. They give us a special profile or character and maybe we shouldn't share them. (Anne, as cited in McRae, 2009, p. 82)

For the CBR and CO respondents, money was described as a vehicle for developing and maintaining the collaboration. The financial resources and grants allow for the creation of programs and outputs and support ongoing collaboration and the dissemination of results.

Reciprocity

Habermas suggests that reciprocity within groups is important, as it fosters socialization and exchange (1987). For reciprocity to occur within community-university collaborations, group members should have a shared understanding about partnership outcomes as well as discussions, regular reviews, and evaluations about the partnership process (Harper, 2008; Panet-Raymond, 1992; Vilches & Goelman, 2008).

Most of the respondents involved in the study indicated that discussions with their partners focused on broad goals such as social change, improved quality of life, and strategies to limit duplication of services, rather than on gaining understanding about the outcomes needed by the partners. As a CBR respondent stated: "I know what's in it for me—but I don't always know what is in it for them [COs] except that it does help them address some issues and some problems" (Hannah, as cited in McRae, 2009, p. 115).

Relationship Building

All of the respondents acknowledged that relationship building is critical for the development of collaborations. Suggestions by respondents for encouraging the relationship process included the careful selection of group members and building on previous partnerships. While the majority of respondents indicated a preference for involvement in ongoing relationships, there was acknowledgement that it is challenging to maintain the association over time. The CO respondents, in particular, noted that it was difficult to maintain consistency within the collaboration due to changes in funding and staffing. For UCE, an added complexity is the time commitment required in developing and maintaining an effective relationship with the community, time that could be used in developing programs and workshops.

Recognition of Community-University Partnerships

The study respondents supported the development of community-university partnerships as a vehicle for increasing knowledge and awareness of specific issues, furthering the understanding of best practices, and supporting the social good. However, a number of the study participants outlined specific challenges that contributed to tensions within their partnerships. These tensions focused on legitimacy, external recognition, and the dissemination of outcomes. For COs, community-university partnerships are important because they increase awareness and legitimacy concerning the COs' aims, help to extend limited community resources, and allow community members to build relationships with researchers and staff who share their interests at the university. The barriers identified by CBR participants related to challenges with the administrative procedures of the institution, particularly those associated with financial accountability. The UCE respondents focused on the lack of direction and support for partnerships given their organization's focus on cost recovery programming. Both CO and CBR respondents identified tensions associated with the dissemination of results. While it was acknowledged that researchers had commitments to publish their findings as part of their scholarly work, the time required for publication often meant that the distribution of reports and other outcomes to the community was delayed.

In addition to the four areas of tension experienced by the respondents, the findings suggest that there are a number of additional factors that constrain the establishment of a common collaborative space, particularly for UCE. The CO and CBR respondents expressed their support for community-university partnerships, identifying that they believe that their combined expertise provided benefits to society. While the UCE respondents were interested in working collaboratively and had some positive experiences, some of the issues they raised in the study were the lack of fit between collaborations for the social good and their unit's organizational structure, an emphasis on revenue generation, and perceptions that the functions of UCE are marginal in relation to the university's mission. One UCE respondent identified her experiences within a UCE unit in the following way:

> I don't think our organizational culture has encouraged it meaningfully, nor has a means been created to help foster and support such initiatives—everyone seems to be trying to meet their budget objectives and keep the workload of staff manageable. Hopefully, an environment of engagement could be developed and projects/programs can run alongside or in complement with other programs. (Jade, as cited in McRae, 2009, p. 78)

Most of the CO and CBR respondents had limited or no experience working with UCE and were unclear how UCE professionals could support community-university partnerships. One of the CO respondents thought that UCE could share resources such as rooms or equipment with the community, while another suggested participation on community boards and assisting with specific projects. Ideas from the CBR respondents concerning UCE's involvement in collaborations included supporting partnerships through the development of workshops and institutes and helping to streamline administrative procedures.

The findings from this study suggested that UCE did not share common space with COs and CBR in collaborations supporting the social good. However, all the respondents provided suggestions identifying how these three groups could work together in the future.

Table 2: The four "Rs": Issues affecting UCE, CBR, and CO participation in community-university partnerships

Unit of Analysis	Issues	Themes
University Continuing Education (UCE)	• Need for revenue generation	Resources/money
	• Ability to facilitate learning needs of CO • Need for clarity about what UCE contributes	Reciprocity
	• Concerns relating to ability to pursue relationship without negatively affecting the bottom line	Relationship building
	• Organizational support • Outputs are measured only in terms of economic contributions	Recognition
Community-Based Research (CBR)	• Need for funding to support the partnership goals	Resources/money
	• Greater administrative flexibility and organizational support within the partnership process • Increased clarity about roles	Reciprocity
	• Time required to build and maintain the relationship	Relationship building
	• Recognition of outputs by the academy • Ability to mobilize useful outputs for the community • Organizational priorities support CBR partnerships	Recognition
Community Organizations (COs)	• Money for staff and clients who participate in the partnership • Funding to support new projects	Resources/money
	• Access to the university and its resources	Reciprocity
	• Involvement in the partnership at its inception	Relationship building
	• Recognition of CO skills and knowledge by partners • Results that build community capacity and well-being	Recognition

Considerations for Reframing the Practice of UCE

In an era of decreased government funding, collaborations between the community and public organizations such as the university are becoming increasingly important. In order to be successful, these collaborations must reflect the values and local contexts of each partner. Accomplishing this requires time, commitment, and organizational support. Based on the findings of this study, I have identified five ways that UCE units could participate in community-university collaborations (Table 3). These approaches, framed as considerations, could expand UCE's role in community engagement by creating spaces within and outside the university for the development of initiatives that support the social good.

Table 3: Considerations for creating a common space for community engagement

Issue/Theme	Approach	Implementation Strategy
Institutionalizing community engagement within the university	To develop an organizational framework for engagement within university continuing education (UCE)	Implement a partnership model for the UCE unit that identifies the purpose and nature of the nonfinancial and financial contributions and outcomes
Building capacity in the community through sharing resources	To adopt an asset-based approach	Share resources and expertise with the community in order to build capacity and further develop the relationship
Expanding opportunities for collaborations and sharing best practices	To affiliate with national organizations and networks	Increase opportunities for comparative research, knowledge exchange, external funding grants, and the exchange of ideas
Gaining recognition for the role that UCE can play in supporting and advancing the understanding of community engagement	To seek external visibility and recognition	Participate in local, national, and international networks, conferences, and research initiatives
Furthering knowledge and research in community engagement	To develop a social theory framework	Utilize social theory approaches in order to seek greater understanding of the tensions and opportunities that connect the practice of UCE

First, a clear vision identifying UCE's role in collaborations and institutional support and recognition would assist a UCE unit with developing and maintaining partnerships. The comments from the UCE study participants suggest that the lack of a partnership model and limited recognition from university administration about their unit's involvement in community-based collaborative work make it difficult for UCE staff to commit to even short-term collaborations with the

community. A partnership model that identifies the purpose of the partnership along with guidelines concerning time commitments and financial commitments or targets would provide a framework for planning and reporting specific contributions and overall outcomes.

Second, UCE professionals can play an important role in helping to build local community capacity through sharing resources and expertise. This could be accomplished through adoption of an asset-based approach to community engagement that supports improved community access to university resources such as use of meeting rooms and computer technology, and participation in the identification, development, and implementation of educational courses and programs. In order to assist community-based organizations with developing the infrastructure, UCE professionals could provide in-kind contributions in the form of staff expertise, participate in committees and boards, and sponsor community workshops. In this way UCE can play an important role in supporting community organizations that could result in the development of relationships as well as increased opportunities for engagement.

Third, in addition to supporting initiatives at the local level, affiliations with national networks could provide increased opportunities for comparative research, knowledge exchange and transfer, and access to or support for multipartner funding grants and proposals. For example, UCE professionals could share their partnership experiences with colleagues by establishing a community engagement committee within organizations such as the Canadian Association for University Continuing Education (CAUCE) or by creating parallel entities similar to Community-Based Research Canada (CBRC) and the Global Alliance for Community-Engaged Research (Hall, 2009). These committees would increase opportunities for knowledge mobilization and exchange among the organizations' members and encourage the development of research collaborations. Increased understanding about UCE's role in engagement activities on a national level may lead to the development of new practices and gain support from community organizations and funding agencies across Canada. Furthermore, these kinds of connections could assist UCE practitioners by increasing the visibility of their work, helping to gain external recognition of the practice. As Hall contends, "Strengthening the links between continuing education and a wide variety of community, regional, national and international networks . . . has much to commend it" (2009, p.19).

Fourth, a number of researchers, including Percival and Kops (1999), Sharpe (1992), and Finger and Asún (2001), suggest that UCE's participation in applied research studies and approaches will influence the development of the practice. Based on the findings from these studies, UCE's involvement in applied research studies with other university and community members could focus on facilitating the development of learning within as well as outside the partnership. Although there are avenues for UCE staff members to develop research studies and publish their findings in publications such as *CJUCE*, the findings from my study identify limited opportunities for establishing research initiatives at the local community level that assist participants with developing and applying new knowledge. In addition to supporting community interests, the involvement of UCE in applied research, including federally funded research projects, could connect UCE's practice more closely with the teaching, research, and service mission of the university.

The final consideration concerns the use of a social theory framework. In my study, the use of social theory constructs allowed for effective within-group and across-group analysis, offering a way to explore the tensions and opportunities within existing or potential multi-partner collaborations relating to *what is* as well as *what could be*. Furthermore, these theories can provide a framework for UCE researchers and practitioners to examine their practice using principles of praxis and the establishment of norms developed through dialogue. An examination of UCE's practice through this social theory lens could provide continuing education units across

Canada with increased awareness of issues within each unit as well as identification of common factors that are consistent across the country. This would help inform UCE units within a local context and connect their practice more broadly by enhancing opportunities for the development of national initiatives that support community engagement.

Limitations of the Study

The data from this study were from a small sample of UCE, CBR, and CO professionals within a defined geographic location. In order to increase the possibility of generalization of the findings, this study should be replicated in other jurisdictions in Canada. Furthermore, the data were collected over a period of approximately six months. Given that the views and concerns of individuals change over time, it is important to note that the issues highlighted by the respondents in this study are a reflection of the conditions specific to the particular time frame and context. There are differences in the organization and management of UCE units in Canada; therefore, some of the findings and recommendations may not be consistent with the experiences and focus of UCE units nationally. Finally, my bias and perspectives along with the theoretical framework used in this study may have influenced how the data were interpreted.

Conclusion

The development of a model for community engagement within UCE would hold the potential to align the organizational and administrative expertise of the UCE unit with that of the university and offer a new way of viewing the practice of UCE from within and outside the university. Linking the skills and interests of UCE professionals with individuals from relevant national organizations could provide further opportunities to develop support systems and programs that influence positive social change. Furthermore, the involvement of UCE in applied research initiatives would extend UCE's visibility in both the community and the university. However, in order to situate the work of UCE professionals within the larger context of community engagement and create common space, members of the university and the community must see UCE professionals as having commitment to the process as well as providing contributions that support collaborations for the social good. Finally, the use of social theories to examine tensions and opportunities within groups and across groups may provide UCE with new perspectives that will influence future practices and support the advancement of community engagement for the benefit of society.

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Biography

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