Articles

The Incubation Model of University-Community Relationships: A Case Study in Creating New Programs, New Knowledge, and New Fields of Practice

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Abstract

Universities in Canada and elsewhere are recognizing the importance of being more engaged with their communities. Indeed, the president of the University of Alberta made engaging with external communities one of the cornerstones of her vision for the institution. So how are universities meeting this challenge? In his book, *Managing Civic and Community Engagement*, David Watson laments the dearth of scholarly attention paid to the practice of civic engagement by universities (Watson, 2007). In this article, I discuss the university-community partnership between the Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta, and the Legal Resource Centre of Alberta Ltd., which began more than 30 years ago. Both a success story and a cautionary tale,

Résumé

Le secteur universitaire au Canada et ailleurs reconnaît l'importance de s'impliquer davantage dans les communautés. En effet, la présidente de l'Université de l'Alberta fit de l'implication avec les communautés externes l'un des piliers de sa vision pour l'institution. Comment les universités répondent-elles à ce défi ? Dans son livre, *Managing Civic and Community Engagement*, David Watson lamente le manque d'attention scolaire à la pratique de l'engagement civique de la part des universités (Watson, 2007). Dans cet article, je discute du partenariat universitaire-communautaire entre la Faculty of Extension de l'Université de l'Alberta et le Legal Resource Centre of Alberta Ltd., lié il y a plus de 30 ans. Une histoire de réussite ainsi

the case study helps to define a little-discussed model of university-community engagement and to expose some of its strengths and limitations. It is useful in advancing both the theory and the practice of university-community engagement.

qu'une histoire d'avertissement, l'étude de case a aidé à définir un modèle peu discuté d'engagement universitaire-communautaire et d'exposer certaines de ses forces et limites. L'étude de cas est utile pour présenter à la fois la théorie et la pratique de l'engagement universitaire-communautaire.

Introduction

Universities in Canada and elsewhere are recognizing the importance of being more engaged with their communities. Although the pressures on them to do so may not be as great as on their American counterparts (Maurrasse, 2001), they are significant. For example, certain research funding programs are contingent on university-community partnerships (e.g., see www.sshrc.ca). In any event, the idea of university-community engagement is timely and appealing. So much so, that in 2005, the president of the University of Alberta made engaging with external communities one of the cornerstones of her vision for the institution (Samerasekera, 2005).

How are we to rise to this challenge? In his recent guidebook, Watson laments the dearth of scholarly descriptions of community engagement (Watson, 2007). In this article, I make a small effort toward redressing that problem by discussing the university-community partnership between the Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta, and the Legal Resource Centre of Alberta Ltd. Both a success story and a cautionary tale, the case study helps to describe and define the incubation model of university-community engagement and to expose some of its strengths and limitations. It is also useful in advancing both the theory and the practice of university-community engagement.

To complicate the task at hand, the project being reviewed here was launched prior to the development of the vocabulary of community engagement. It was conceived during the 1970s, another time in which universities were being called upon to be more socially relevant. For those of us around then, today's emphasis on engaging universities with communities on socially relevant issues may provoke a strong sense of déjà vu. And so, perhaps, some lessons can be drawn from that time.

THE INCUBATION MODEL OF
UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

To date, the incubation model of university-community engagement has received little treatment in the academic literature (Dean, Burstein, Woodsmall, & Mathews, 2000; Maurrasse, 2001). Where it has, the discussion has tended to focus on projects that incubate businesses. Universities are, in fact, major incubators of new businesses (Joseph, Bordt, & Hamdani, 2006); some even have specific units to support the commercializing of basic research.

In the business context, incubation tends to refer to

> an innovative, evolving organizational form to create value by combining the entrepreneurial drive of a start-up with resources generally available to large or medium-sized firms. Business incubators nurture young firms during their formative years when they are most vulnerable, helping them to survive and grow into viable commercial enterprises. (Hamdani, 2006)

Engaged universities might want to consider incubating other types of enterprises, and it is the incubation of those other sorts of enterprises that is discussed here.

For the purposes of this article, the incubation model of university-community engagement refers to activities that a university undertakes in partnership with an external agency to create a new entity, program, or field of practice where the partners expect the product of the incubation to devolve to the community at some point. The university may provide support through the basic research or "proof of concept" stages, either until the sustainability of the activity is established or until the external partner has acquired the capacity to undertake the activity alone.

Incubation of activities can occur in a deliberate way. The parties may enter into the partnership with a clear idea of what they are incubating and the terms of the incubation. Or, it can occur in a less deliberate way. The parties may enter into the partnership on a tentative basis, not clear on what is being incubated or the ongoing nature or duration of the partnership. In the case under study here, the expectations as to what was to happen in incubating the program or in its ongoing development were not clear. Was it to become a full-fledged program of the Faculty of Extension? Or, was it simply to spend its first few years under the watchful eye of an organization that had credibility with its key funder? Despite those uncertainties, a number of attributes of the incubation model of university-community engagement can be discerned from the experience. And because of those uncertainties, a number of lessons can be learned about using the incubation model more deliberately and deliberatively.

The Context of the Case Study

The example of university-community engagement outlined here arose in the context of the Faculty of Extension of the University of Alberta, a provincially funded, public research-intensive university in Canada. The Faculty has almost 100 years of experience in engaging with communities. Its programs and outreach activities have spanned the continuum of informal, non-formal, and formal learning opportunities. Members of the Faculty have engaged in both theoretical and applied research. And the Faculty has an enviable history of community service, outreach, and citizenship activities (Rogers, 1993). Like many of its American counterparts (see Kelly, 2006), the Faculty of Extension has developed models of engagement that might be emulated by others who are new to the field.

The story is told from the perspective of the first director of the program that was established as a result of that partnership. The author was, for most of this story, also a member of the board of directors of the community partner. As a result, the case study reflects the strengths and weaknesses of being told by a participant who has insider knowledge of what took place, who had a great deal invested in the success of the program, and who still has vivid and sometimes emotionally charged memories of much of what took place. The author has remained with the Faculty since the devolution but continues to support the community organization as academic advisor.

A Brief Version of the Story

In the late 1960s, the need for public access to legal knowledge on a sustained and widespread basis became a matter of particular social concern (Gander, 1999). By 1975, a group representing a mix of community, government, and professional interests in Alberta formed a charitable organization, the Legal Resource Centre of Alberta Ltd. (LRC), to provide that access. The LRC proposed to take a multidisciplinary approach to designing and developing educational resources and providing educational services. That meant hiring several professional staff and acquiring the multimedia equipment of the day. Setting up the organization would, therefore, be expensive and capital intensive. Since the LRC was new and the concept of public legal education (PLE) was relatively untested, the organization's funder was reluctant to commit to the model of an independent organization. So the LRC sought a partner that would provide institutional credibility and access to equipment, furnishings, and space. It found that partner in the Department of Extension at the University of Alberta.

Although the partnership was initiated with the expectation that the Faculty would serve as a supportive incubator of the proposed program,

that term was not used explicitly, nor was any particular model of incuba-
tion adopted. Instead, over the next 30 years, the balance of the responsibil-
ity for guiding and developing the program shifted back and forth between
the LRC and what soon became the Faculty of Extension.

The Start-up Period (The First Decade)

At the time the LRC approached Extension, the Department was in the pro-
cess of becoming a faculty. Its director (and first dean) was interested in
exploring innovative forms of lifelong learning, but a number of more spe-
cific factors made the partnership particularly appropriate. The Department
was already involved in providing continuing legal education (CLE) for
lawyers and had some experience in providing training for the province's
Native court workers. The director of the Department also served on the
board of the Alberta Law Foundation, the LRC's funder, and so was aware
of its interests and concerns. As it happened, one of the LRC board mem-
bers was the University's law librarian who was also involved with both
the Department's CLE and Native counselling program. Recognizing the
opportunity that Extension provided the LRC and vice versa, he played an
instrumental role in matchmaking. The result was the establishment of a
program called the Legal Resource Centre (the Centre) in what soon became
the Faculty of Extension (the Faculty).

These were the days before memoranda of understanding, formal affilia-
tion agreements, risk-management offices, and scrutiny of almost everything
by layers of university bureaucracy. The arrangements between the LRC and
the Faculty were documented simply—and only in part at that—in "work-
ing arrangements" drafted by the dean. Other aspects of the partnership
were left undocumented and, in some cases, were not even discussed.

The dean's chief concerns were that the Centre should be administered as
much as possible like other units of the Faculty and that the Faculty would
assume no liability for the Centre's costs. As the chief executive officer of the
Faculty, he had authority over the allocation of its resources. Although he
was prepared to make limited space available within the Faculty's premises,
he made it clear that no tenure-track positions would be granted as part of
the partnership. However, his authority over the operation of the Centre was
subject to some limits. Grants and other funds were managed in accordance
with the University's policies and procedures for trust funds; that meant
that the holder of the Centre's funds, its director, had authority over them.
Since academic and non-academic staff was hired in accordance with the
University's policies and procedures for trust employees, the director had
more leeway than would have been the case with operating funds. However,
the quid pro quo was that the director was personally liable for any over
expenditures of funds.

For its part, the LRC's concerns lay with the leadership and nature of the Centre's activities and with the ultimate ownership of any furniture, equipment, or intellectual property acquired with funding from the Alberta Law Foundation. It would exercise its power through its responsibility for funding the Centre. Throughout this phase, the LRC served as an advisory committee to the staff of the program.

The Integration Period (The Next Two Decades)

As luck would have it, initially the Centre thrived in the University environment. The program benefited from the infrastructure the University provided. Staff benefited from being immersed in an environment in which the theory and practice of adult education was valued and the emerging field of lifelong learning was supported. Staff also took advantage of the range of courses offered by the Faculty, particularly courses on adult education and organizational management.

Not that the parties co-existed without tensions. For example, when the Centre grew beyond the Faculty's ability to house it and began looking for space off-campus, the dean-of-the-day took the position that leaving campus meant leaving the Faculty and therefore the University. The dean also took the position that the Centre's early efforts to work directly with children fell outside the Faculty's mandate. Fortunately, those and other conflicts were successfully resolved without detracting materially from the Centre's ability to carry out its work. Centre staff worked both at developing an effective and systematic approach to public legal education and at integrating themselves and the program into the Faculty. So successful were these efforts that the Alberta Law Foundation asked the LRC to turn over responsibility for the program to the Faculty. The LRC was willing to go partway in revising the custody arrangements but remained concerned that the Centre's long-term interests might be sacrificed, over time, to other Faculty priorities. Again a memo, this time written by the program's director, documented the change in the relationship, suggesting conditions under which the Faculty might assume full responsibility for the program, conditions that included allocating a tenure-track position to the program. With that conditional change in the relationship, the LRC lost control over the operation and development of the program.

Unfortunately, during this period, the Alberta Law Foundation experienced a drop in its revenues, which severely compromised its ability to continue funding the Centre. As a result, the Centre began the painful process of dismantling most of its ongoing services; at the same time, it began experimenting with new electronic telecommunications formats for providing services and successfully obtained funding for those innovative services from new sources. To separate the new from the old and to signal that important

changes were taking place, the name "Legal Resource Centre" was phased out and the name "Legal Studies Program" (LSP) was introduced. With that name change, the Centre sounded like, even if it did not look like, other programs in the Faculty, which at the time included a Government Studies Program and a Liberal Studies Program. Cuts to its funding also meant the Centre/LSP could no longer afford its off-campus space and the remnants of its program were relocated to the Faculty's newly acquired and expanded premises. On the brighter side, the dean-of-the-day, in consultation with the Faculty's academic staff, decided the time had come to allocate the proposed tenure-track position to the Centre/LSP.

By the time all these measures had taken effect, the Centre/LSP was almost completely integrated into the Faculty, anchored there by a tenured Faculty member. Both its programming (provision of informal and non-formal learning opportunities vs. formal, credentialed programming) and business model (grant funded vs. registration revenue) were still significantly different from those of other programs. However, other units in the Faculty were also changing with the times, in some instances becoming involved in activities similar to those of the Centre/LSP. Although it played only a minimal role in directing the program, the LRC continued to exist.

The Devolution Period (The Fourth Decade)

Faculties and the universities of which they are a part go through periods of change and uncertainty. Presidents and deans come and go, hoping to leave their mark on the university and faculty, respectively. During the more than 30 years of collaboration under review in this article, the University of Alberta had three presidents. The Faculty had four deans, one interim dean, and four acting deans. (The Centre had one director!) The Centre/LSP did its best to accommodate changes in the University's strategic plans and in Faculty personnel, priorities, and administrative processes. When the president wanted internationalization, the Centre/LSP would tout the influence it was having internationally on the development of public legal education (PLE) programs. When the dean wanted to emphasize continuing professional development, the Centre/LSP cited its work with teachers, librarians, and community leaders. When research grants became the currency of the day, the Centre/LSP could proudly point to the director's being a co-principal research director of the largest research project in which the Faculty had ever been engaged.

In the mid-1990s, the Faculty's core operating funding from the University was drastically reduced. At the same time, the Faculty had to deal with a recession and the resulting drop in student enrolments and revenue from that source. Deans began to expect all programming units to contribute to the Faculty's bottom line. The Centre/LSP's funding model did not allow

it to meet those expectations, however. The Alberta Law Foundation and some of the Centre/LSP's other funders would not allow any of their funding to be used to cover the program's indirect costs and thus compensate the Faculty for its infrastructure support. The reasons for this stance varied and included the view that if the University wanted to undertake an activity, it should allocate some of its own resources to do so. At least one funder took the view that the University's infrastructure was a bottomless black hole. Yet, some of those funders would support the same costs if incurred by an independent agency. As a result, the LSP could get funding for space if it left the University but not for University-owned space. Deans took various measures to try to force the LSP to cover those costs, sometimes cutting back on Faculty support or imposing charges for services. In the final instance, the dean-of-the-day imposed administrative levies on the program, which created a significant over expenditure on the trust account for which the program's director was then personally liable.

From time to time, Faculty politics also conspired against the Centre/LSP. Deans varied in their interest in the informal and non-formal forms of life-long learning that were the basis of the Centre/LSP's program. Some deans had difficulty accepting the relative independence the Centre/LSP enjoyed because of the control that the director had over the program's funds. One dean attempted to constrain that independence by challenging the salary of one of the Centre/LSP's academic staff. The issue was only resolved by the resignation of the individual in question and the loss to the Centre/LSP of a valuable senior staff member. As the leadership of the Centre/LSP began to take succession planning seriously, the dean-of-the-day would not commit to assigning a tenure-track position to the program on the retirement of the director. Added to that mix of tensions were the inevitable personality conflicts between individual members of the staff of the Centre/LSP and the Faculty, particularly between the director and some deans.

Over time, it became increasingly apparent that the long-term prospects for the Centre/LSP within the Faculty could not be assured. The crisis over the imposition of the Faculty's administrative levy brought the matter to a head. When the director was unable to get senior administrators in the University to intervene effectively, she concluded that the program would have to be devolved out of the Faculty. Finding no other homes for the program within the University, she decided that responsibility for its PLE activities should devolve back to the dormant Legal Resource Centre of Alberta Ltd (LRC). Although the Faculty would then no longer be directly involved in providing public legal education, it would retain its mandate for teaching, research, and service regarding PLE theory and practice.

The final decision to transfer the program to the Legal Resource Centre was made by the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) in January 2006.

A transition committee oversaw the various administrative matters that needed to be addressed. Since the Centre/LSP's director, by now a tenured professor, would remain with the Faculty, its associate director agreed to become the executive director of the LRC, thereby ensuring continuity of the program and stability in its staffing.

This time the restructuring of the partnership was documented in several legally binding agreements between the University and the LRC: a transfer agreement, a bill of sale, a licence of intellectual property, and an assignment of contracts. The parties also obtained a consent order transferring trusteeship over the Centre/LSP's endowment from the University to the LRC. The parties each bore their own legal costs.

Currently, the Faculty and the LRC are discussing ways in which they might continue to collaborate. Both parties want to ensure that maximum long-term benefit is realized from the knowledge, expertise, and networks that were developed by the Centre/LSP over more than 30 years. The present agreement facilitates the LRC's access to the University's library holdings, including important PLE resources deposited there by the Centre/LSP, and provides the LRC with some infrastructure services that it needs as the transition proceeds. The former director of the Centre/LSP continues to be involved with the LRC in a variety of ways, including as academic advisor to the overall program and as an advisor on some of the specific projects it undertakes. For its part, the LRC continues to co-operate with the University in accepting students for appropriate placements, in providing guest lecturers for various programs, and in undertaking joint research and educational projects.

From the point of view of both parties, the devolution of the program went smoothly. The LRC lost little momentum in the transition and has expanded its program. Its previous funders have continued to support the program, and it is attracting funding from new sources. It has more than twice the office and programming space it was allocated in the Faculty and has even been able to unpack the remnants of its library for the first time in a decade or so.

The Role of the Incubator

As this case study discloses, the services needed from the University in support of non-commercial enterprises can be quite similar to those in the business context. As might be expected, the Faculty provided services and support at various times, including physical space; equipment and furnishings; financial, personnel, and technology support services; professional, business, management, and technical consulting; and access to internal funding sources. Like many business incubators, the Faculty also provided a supportive, interactive community of academics that helped sustain the fragile new program.

What Was Incubated

The mandate of the Centre/LSP was to facilitate the establishment of a comprehensive network of legal educational services, thereby increasing public concern for and involvement in the legal system. One of the first agencies in Canada to tackle the growing demand for public legal education (PLE), it quickly assumed a leadership role. Using innovative educational strategies and methods, the Centre/LSP incubated an innovative educational program and a body of knowledge about PLE theory and practice. Much of this knowledge is now referred to in the scholarship of engagement as the scholarship of integration and the scholarship of application. In working together as a team, staff integrated insights from several disciplines into their practice. Working with communities on practical issues led them to "new insights, methods, policies, theories, and practices" (Simpson, 2000, p. 9).

Attributes of the Incubation Model of Community Engagement

From this brief sketch of the evolution of the Faculty of Extension–Legal Resource Centre partnership, it is possible to discern some attributes that help to define the incubation model of community engagement.

The Nature of the Partnership

One of the features of university engagement is the role the community plays in the initiative. Although communities are partners in these activities, not all partnerships look alike. Indeed, the University of Minnesota Civic Engagement Task Force created a typology of six kinds of successful partnerships: consultative, technical assistance, convenience, generative, mutual benefit, and outreach. Of these six, the relationship between the Faculty and the LRC most resembled a generative partnership: "a relationship between some part of the academy and some external entity that produces something—deliberately vague—that takes on its own life" (Civic Engagement Task Force, 2002).

The examples of various centres launched through partnerships between the University of Minnesota and its communities suggest that the generative partnership lends itself particularly well to incubating programs like the Centre/LSP that cannot be well defined from the outset. However, more case studies will likely reveal that other forms of partnership may also be successful.

Common Purpose, Compatible Interests, Different Realities, and Future Prospects

One of the essential attributes of the incubation model is that both the faculty/university and its potential partner(s) have a significant reason to come together. However, since the relationship is meant to be short term, both must also realize that their interests, while compatible, are not identical. Equally prominent attributes of the incubation model are the different realities and futures of the partners. If they were following the same trajectory, devolution would likely be unnecessary.

In the case under study, the Faculty's general mandate was to provide university-level lifelong learning and to engage in outreach activities. When the Centre was first established, the Faculty's programming was quite broad and so the Faculty and the LRC's purposes and interests overlapped significantly. But, as the Faculty became increasingly dependent on external sources of funding, its programming became increasingly concentrated in English-as-a-second-language courses and accredited professional-development programs. As well, over time, the Faculty began to put more emphasis on the research function of its academic staff and less on their programming role. Although these changes made sense from the perspective of the Faculty, they ran counter to the realities facing the staff of the LSP.

Those and other experiences in responding to internal and external forces exposed legitimate differences between the priorities of the Faculty and those of the LSP. The Faculty's future depended upon effectively responding to shifting priorities of universities and the realities of the Faculty's markets. The LSP's future depended upon effectively responding to shifting community needs, funders' priorities, and the evolution of the PLE field itself. There were recurring tensions around the almost complete absence of formally structured law courses and programs of study offered by the Centre/LSP. The appropriateness of alternative, informal learning formats used by the Centre/LSP was the unresolved subject of debate. Although the Faculty is currently reorienting itself around the concept of community engagement—an orientation much more compatible with the LSP's future—history suggests that this may represent merely a temporary criss-crossing of their paths rather than a long-term realignment of their futures (Archer & Wright, 1999).

Shared but Different Governance Responsibilities

The idea of partnership carries with it the notion that the partners share decision-making. Although only partially documented, the governance functions flowed naturally from the respective structures of the two partners in the case study. The Board of Governors of the University has overall governance responsibility for the institution. As procedures within the University became more formalized, contracts between the Centre/LSP and its funders

were entered into by that board (through the office of the Provost and Vice-President). The deans of various faculties at the University are the chief executive officers of their respective faculties and have authority over faculty operations. Extension Faculty Council has authority over the Faculty's academic program. One of its committees, the Faculty Evaluation Committee, has responsibility for evaluating tenure-track faculty members. As a new faculty, Extension was just putting some of its governance structures in place and consciously addressing some of the unique features of the work of the Centre/LSP. For example, the definition of "teaching" in the Faculty's policies for evaluating faculty members made specific provision for the range of roles that faculty members might play in informal learning environments.

For its part, the board of the LRC exercised its governance function through its responsibility for funding Centre/LSP activities. Although the partners never formalized these arrangements under an agency agreement, the continuation of funding was contingent on the LRC remaining satisfied with the direction and management of the program. In this arrangement, the board's real concern was to ensure that the Centre/LSP effectively pursued its public legal education mission and was not distracted by Faculty priorities or activities.

These various types of oversight were, for the most part, complementary. However, as has been noted, from time to time individual deans exercised their executive authority in such a way as to interfere with the smooth operations of the Centre/LSP. And, certainly, from time to time the direction being given to the Centre/LSP by the LRC put it at odds with the leadership of the Faculty.

Innovation in Knowledge Development, Application, Integration, and Teaching

For a faculty to become interested in incubating a community-based program, body of knowledge, or practice, the proposed venture is likely to be innovative in some respect. It may be a new content area, field of practice, or method of addressing an issue, but some aspect of the program must capture the imagination of the faculty. As well, the faculty should be intrigued by the opportunities for generating new knowledge through application, integration, and practice. Faculties may also be attracted to this type of activity as a way of learning how to manage innovation.

In the case of the LRC, little was articulated to indicate what about the program really interested the Faculty. The Faculty was coming through a difficult period in its own development and looking for ideas and activities that might help it re-imagine its future. Innovation was certainly valued at the time, but the vocabulary and ideas that now form part of the scholarship of engagement did not exist to help with this discussion.

What Lessons Can Be Learned about University-Community Partnerships from this Experience?

University-community engagement is not for the faint of heart. There are significant differences in the cultures of communities and universities that create tensions. In engaging with communities, universities will put their core values and beliefs to the test. What does the university really stand for? The loyalty of the staff to the program can strain relations between the staff and one or both of the partners. If the interpersonal relations of key individuals become strained, other tensions can become difficult to resolve, with the result that both the program and the people involved can suffer. Even in the academy, issues that should be examined objectively can sometimes become personalized. This case study serves as an opportunity to explore some of those issues with the benefit of hindsight, albeit also with the risk of revisionism.

Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is both a virtue and a limitation in engaging with communities. The principle of academic freedom allows individual faculty members to pursue their work with communities without interference. At the same time, the principle makes it difficult for the university to make an institutional commitment to a community because it may not be able to direct faculty members to perform on that commitment. Institutional commitments must therefore either be general and capable of being addressed in a number of ways or be very specific, probably time limited, and capable of being addressed by identified and willing individuals. The Centre/LSP was always vulnerable to a change in its own leadership. A new academic director might have taken the program in a radically different direction and might have abandoned the communities that had been served for decades.

Common Functions and Compatible Philosophies

Whether couched as teaching, as research and service, or as learning, discovery, and citizenship, the more similar the functions of the faculty and the proposed incubation the better. The same applies to their respective philosophies of university-community engagement, adult education, social justice, or other constructs that underlie their work.

As a unit, the Centre/LSP engaged in the range of teaching, research, and service functions normally associated with a university, but not all the academics in the unit were directly involved in all three. There were times, for example, when the administration of the program fully occupied the director. That was not a problem unique to the Centre/LSP; directors of other Faculty

programs have also found it difficult to maintain a research program while overseeing large and complex programming units. Nor is this a problem unique to the incubation model of community engagement. Conflict between academic responsibilities and community needs is a recurring concern as universities attempt to transform themselves into engaged institutions.

The saving grace in this conflict was the Faculty's philosophy about the unique nature of university extension. At the time that the Centre/LSP was being incubated, there was a widely held view in the Faculty that extension work required different approaches to teaching, research, and service from those of other faculties and that the balance between them might also be quite different. That difference was valued and even celebrated. However, there were times when this consensus was undermined and more limited ideas and ideals were promoted. Difference was seen as undesirable and certain kinds of differences were more undesirable than others. At those times, the work of the LSP was marginalized and its future within the Faculty was much in doubt. It would have been easier on all concerned if the functions and philosophies of the Faculty and the Centre/LSP had been better aligned.

Accountability, Accountability, Accountability

The flip side of governance is accountability. In the case of the Centre/LSP, this meant accountability within the University structure and to the external community. The program director was responsible to the dean of the Faculty for the administration of the Centre/LSP and to the Extension Faculty Council for the academic quality of the program. Typically, the director met with the dean a few times a year to report on activities and discuss any operational issues that might arise. Faculty Council was to undertake academic reviews of programs every five years but, in practice, those reviews were less frequent. The program director was responsible for providing annual budgets and activity and financial reports to the LRC and, later, directly to the Alberta Law Foundation; the director was also accountable to other funders for grants received or contracts entered into.

Those multiple forms of accountability meant that the program was subject to a great deal of review. In addition to being time-consuming in their own right, those reviews were challenging, as they had quite different requirements. Both the language in which activities were to be reported and the expectations for those activities were different. In the case of accounting within the University, the program needed to be described in terms of teaching, research, and service as if those were more discrete than they actually were.

For the most part, the distinctions between teaching, research, and service were not relevant to either the community the Centre/LSP served or its funders. The community just wanted results and funders wanted reports to

address the project's goals and objectives (preferably measurable), strategies and activities, and outputs and impacts. Speaking both the language of the University and the language of the external community was burdensome and, in some instances, neither adequately described what was really happening in the program. The new vocabulary of community engagement is unlikely to solve this problem.

Shared Governance Responsibilities

Governance responsibilities should be shared on the basis of each partner's strengths and weaknesses so as to gain maximum benefit from the partnership. The external agency should be involved as much as possible and as early as possible, since early decisions about the program may be critical to its sustainability on devolution. The more clearly these shared governance responsibilities are articulated and understood, the easier the sharing of decision-making is likely to be for all parties. However, both parties should be prepared to be flexible in response to unexpected or changing conditions. In the case of the Centre, there was some overlap in membership on decision-making bodies. The Faculty was represented on the board of the LRC and members of the board often served on the Extension Faculty Council. This overlap helped to facilitate communication.

University Governance

The governance structure of universities may make it difficult to maintain continuity in community engagement. Deans of faculties have considerable executive authority or influence over the kinds of programming that will thrive in the faculty. Changes in deans can bring with them radical changes in the amount and type of community engagement that will occur. Whatever might be said of this fact in the abstract, it can be disastrous to community relations. All that the faculty has invested in building social capital in communities can be lost almost overnight.

Protecting the incubated program against the vagaries of university leadership requires explicit discussion in the partnership-development process. This was a problem the Centre/LSP struggled with throughout its existence and was a key reason why the program did not become fully integrated into the Faculty.

Integration of the Program into the Faculty

The more loosely the incubated program is integrated into the faculty, the less likely the faculty will be committed to supporting the program when the going gets tough. The corollary also holds. The more tightly the incubated program is integrated into the faculty, the more vulnerable the program is to losing its sense of its own mission and its accountability to

the community or communities it serves. Maintaining an optimum balance between integration and independence can be tricky. The Centre/LSP also struggled with this issue throughout its time in the Faculty— like Goldilocks, trying out all the beds.

Devolution

The ultimate devolution of the product of the incubation needs to be handled with care and in an atmosphere of goodwill. Devolution to an external agency carries with it risks. It may be confusing to those who have come to know it as a university-based service, and there may be implications for staff and communities served. There may be legal complexities (such as identifying and transferring intellectual property) that must be addressed. Since the incubated program is apt to be innovative in some way, it may be difficult to prescribe in advance when devolution should take place. An atmosphere of goodwill and a willingness to be flexible on the part of both parties is certainly desirable, although it cannot be assured. To protect against an ugly and protracted divorce, some sort of mediation process should be included in the partnership arrangements. This may also be helpful throughout the term of the incubation.

Documenting the Incubation Process

From a scholarly point of view, a deliberate effort should be made to document the incubation process. Notes, interviews, or some other record of the motivations, thoughts, reactions, and decisions of the key players as the incubation proceeds will facilitate reflection on the experience.

Time and Patience

Incubating programs, new knowledge, and new fields of practice takes time and patience. It is trite to say that mistakes will be made along the way. It is less trite, perhaps, to say that the culture of universities needs to change to allow a longer view to be taken in assessing the work of academics. Meaning-making is iterative and takes time and patience.

Dealing with Different Priorities

Academics and communities have different priorities for what they need to know and different ways to come by that knowledge. In short, they have different priorities, timelines, and processes for learning. Communities are on the front lines of service delivery and have funding cycles that differ from universities' academic cycles. Communities are used to making judgment calls quickly and can be impatient with academic deliberation, exam schedules, and performance reviews. Universities and their funders need to understand that engaging with communities means changing university

culture. Painful as that may prove to be, it is, after all, exactly what those who promote the concept of community engagement as a way of revitalizing universities want to see.

Some Unanswered Questions

A number of practical questions about university-community engagement remain unanswered. University-community engagement is expensive. Who should bear those costs when the benefits are shared with or even disproportionately realized by the community? How can extension and continuing education units or others that must operate on a cost-recovery basis undertake those activities? Are there new ways of conceiving university-community engagement that can overcome some of the impediments that currently exist?

With hindsight, there is no doubt that a more deliberative assessment of the benefits to the Faculty from the collaboration with the LRC might have made it easier to address some of the issues that arose in the course of their collaboration. Some forethought might have made it clearer to all when the incubation period had been completed and the devolution period should begin. Both the initial decision to host the LCR and the decision to devolve it seem to have been based more on the alignment of personalities and opportunities than on any clear sense of what was to be achieved on behalf of both partners by the incubation. Much more could also have been done to analyze and theorize the experience—to compare and contrast it with other activities going on in the Faculty and elsewhere and to reflect on the collaboration and the activities undertaken from a variety of theoretical perspectives.

Leadership

Although I have put leadership last in my list of lessons to be learned from the experience of the Faculty and the LRC, many authors highlight this as the most important ingredient in the successful transformation of universities to engaged institutions. The discussion in those articles tends to focus on the key role that university presidents play in transformation. Without diminishing the importance of presidential leadership in any way, though, the Centre/LSP's experience also demonstrates the importance of leadership at the faculty and program levels. The support and lack of support of the deans of the Faculty at various times had major impacts on the program—indeed, this touched on its very survival. However, the commitment of senior staff to the program was determinative. Without that, the Centre/LSP would not have survived the many challenges it faced within the University and in the external community; certainly, it would not have met with the success it did in developing the program, the practice of public legal education, and a new field of knowledge.

Conclusion

The partnership described here enabled the Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta to engage with a wide variety of community organizations in a range of ways not normally possible through conventional teaching, research, and service. In doing so, it was able to bring forth new knowledge, integrate existing knowledge, and apply it in meeting key social issues. In all, over a 30-year partnership, the Faculty and the Legal Resource Centre of Alberta Ltd. played a significant role not only in advancing access to justice for thousands of individuals and hundreds of community, service, and advocacy agencies but also in developing their capacities to participate in civil society.

But true partnerships demand much from each partner. For university-community engagement to work, universities must be more open to the knowledge and interests of others outside the academy. They must be more flexible in allocating the time of and recognizing the work of their own staff. And they must be prepared to withhold judgment on the work of academics involved in university-community engagement long enough for its value to emerge. The experience of the Centre/LSP shows that community engagement, in this case practiced at several levels, can generate new knowledge and ways of sharing that knowledge—but it takes time.

Faculties of extension and continuing education have considerable scope and a wide range of options for undertaking innovative, socially relevant work. The incubation model of community engagement might appeal particularly to those faculties and to any other faculties that want to engage with communities in open and fluid ways. It is a model that can facilitate transdisciplinary approaches to developing innovative, multi-faceted programs and services.

The use of the incubation model in university-community engagement invites the development of both theory and practice with respect to matters such as the purposes and objectives for engaging in incubation, the criteria for selecting projects, the nature of the services provided, performance measures for selected projects, and the value of the proposition itself. Although faculties may find assistance in the models developed for incubating businesses, they may want to remain open to providing other forms of support, playing other roles than those models suggest, and adding different kinds of value to the investment of their resources.

This account of the incubation of a program and a new field of knowledge and practice describes one of many ways in which universities can engage with communities. Community engagement challenges the university to examine its traditional ways of bringing knowledge into being. Community engagement takes as its core assumption that not all knowledge

can be created, discovered, or shared in the academic milieu. This can be threatening to universities and to academics who have been trained to believe in conventional research and teaching methods. But when they work, university-community partnerships are more than simply a coupling of resources. They can transcend the combined talents and expectations of the partners. Clearly, there are opportunities and risks for faculties of extension and continuing education in the "rising tide" of outreach and engagement that need to be managed (McLean, Thompson, & Jonker, 2006). However, this new approach to scholarship can most certainly be "a major catalyst for our ongoing attempt to make Extension a more understandable and desirable venue for academic toil" (Campbell, 1991).

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Websites

Legal Resource Centre of Alberta Ltd.: www.legalresourcecentre.ca

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council: www.sshrc.ca

Biography

With almost 35 years experience in providing university-based continuing education, Professor Gander has worked in a variety of contexts with both mainstream and marginalized communities and with governmental and non-governmental agencies that address contemporary social issues.

Dotée de près de 35 années d'expérience à fournir une éducation permanente universitaire, Professeure Gander a travaillé dans une variété de contextes à la fois avec des communautés connues et éloignées et avec des agences ministérielles et non ministérielles qui adressent les enjeux sociaux contemporains.