Forum / Tribune

Higher Education, Community Engagement, and the Public Good: Building the Future of Continuing Education in Canada

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Abstract

This article is about the potential for university-community engagement to serve the public good by transforming the health and well-being of our communities. It documents contemporary expressions of and renewed calls for community-university engagement. It includes a detailed treatment of community-based research, discussed in the overall context of community-university engagement. The article also explores some other important and growing dimensions of community-university engagement, including the development of structures for the support of community-based research and community-service learning. It concludes with an argument that university-community engagement, while not the only current trend in higher education that

Résumé

Cet article porte sur le potentiel pour que l'engagement universitaire-communautaire puisse servir au bien public en transformant la santé et le bien-être de nos communautés. L'article documente les expressions contemporaines et renouvelle la demande pour l'engagement universitaire-communautaire. Cela comprend un traitement détaillé de recherches communautaires, discuté dans le contexte global de l'engagement universitaire-communautaire. L'article explore aussi certaines autres dimensions importantes et croissantes de l'engagement universitaire-communautaire, y compris le développement de structures à l'appui de recherches communautaires et d'apprentissage-service communautaire. En conclusion,

affects our work in continuing education, is nonetheless a very important new development in which continuing education has much to offer and much to gain.

l'article propose que l'engagement universitaire-communautaire, bien qu'il ne soit pas la seule tendance actuelle en éducation supérieure qui affecte notre travail en éducation permanente, constitue toutefois un nouveau développement très important dans lequel l'éducation permanente a beaucoup de choses à offrir et pourra profiter beaucoup.

Introduction

The Canadian Association for University Continuing Education has long contributed to the ongoing debate and discussion about the relationship between continuing education and the public good. Ned Corbett, J. Roby Kidd, and Alan Thomas, all former directors of the Canadian Association for Adult Education, participated in these debates from the 1940s to the 1980s (Brooke & Waldron, 1994; Selman, 1998). More recently, Denis Haughey (2006) challenged us to live up to the ideals of the Regina Manifesto and the foundational values of continuing education in Canada, while Scott McLean (2007) and Tom Nesbit (2008), writing in this journal, revived the professional debate on directions worth pursuing.

A proposition on the potential of university-community engagement to serve the public good by transforming the health and well-being of our communities is at the heart of this article. Contemporary expressions of and renewed calls for university-community engagement are documented, and it is suggested that community engagement, while not the only trend in higher education that affects our work in continuing education, is a significant trend, to which continuing education has much to offer and from which it has much to gain. Some of the other important and growing newer dimensions of university-community engagement, including the development of structures for the support of community-based research and community-service learning, are explored. (The detailed treatment of community-based research is due to the author's particular interest in that aspect of community engagement and is not a reflection of its relative strengths compared to those of either continuing education or community-service learning.) Reference is also made to a useful analytic tool developed by Ted Jackson (2008) at Carleton University—the "CUE Factor" or community-university engagement for social innovation.

A Transformative Idea

For those who work within universities, the emergence of university-community engagement is far more than an effort to consolidate space. It may, in fact, be a critical strategic choice for public investment that will allow us to respond to the challenges we face today. Therefore, I present the following proposition:

> In communities where institutions of higher education exist, the collective resources of these universities and colleges (students, academic staff, facilities, research funding, knowledge, skills, and capacities to facilitate learning) represent our largest accessible, available, and underutilized resource for community change and sustainability.

This is critical, as we are not likely to see substantial new public money flowing into our communities either from community tax bases, from provincial coffers, or from the federal government in the foreseeable future. Communities need to take an asset-based approach to increasing the sustainability of community health and economic development. Institutions of higher education already exist in hundreds of communities across the country, and deepening the range of university-community engagement practices in these communities has the promise of bringing into play new energies and practical resources.

In the specific context of Victoria, B.C., there are roughly 300,000 inhabitants and three higher education institutions: the University of Victoria, Royal Roads University, and Camosun College. The annual flow of research funds through these institutions is greater than $100 million per year; combined, these three institutions have some 35,000 students and 4,500 faculty and staff. A modest shift in the institutional gaze of these institutions, along with some imaginative partnership structures, could have a significant impact on current community issues, such as homelessness, food security, and Aboriginal health and education. The Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada, in its 2008 report on research and knowledge mobilization, noted:

> Community partnerships help universities to define and scope the research questions and provide access to research partnerships and sources of local expertise, as well as additional funding and in-kind contributions. In turn, universities provide communities with access to wide-ranging and in-depth knowledge and national and international expertise that informs and addresses community challenges and opportunities in a meaningful way. (p. 85)

Continuing Education: Assets and Challenges

Continuing education units across the country have over 100 years of experience in university-community engagement. We have a strong practical base in the field of lifelong learning, one of the cornerstones of civic or community engagement. We have become, sometimes reluctantly, extremely creative and entrepreneurial. We know our communities. We not only know the business world and the world of the professions, we also know those who have been pushed or left out of our education institutions. And, importantly, we have a remarkable variety of community-based learning and teaching facilities in our communities. Nonetheless, we still face significant challenges that must be addressed.

Over the past 30 years, central institutional financial support for continuing education has declined dramatically. While at one time all continuing education units in Canada had core budgets to support their programming costs, today, it is the rare institution that can still count on central university funds to underpin its social engagement mission of community programming. As a former dean of Education at my own university, I am aware that some in the university believe that continuing education lies outside the core functions of the university. Although continuing education is cherished by senior administration for its revenue-generating capacities, in many of our universities, a broad and mysterious cloud hangs over what actually happens in most of our programming areas. For the most part, continuing education is not considered to be at the core of the knowledge-creation function, the university's research function; it is degree-credit programs that lie at the heart of the university enterprise. Finally, a split between the academic study of adult and lifelong learning and the fields of continuing education seems to have evolved. In the 1970s and 1980s, Canadian academic researchers in adult education would meet regularly with university continuing education practitioners. Indeed, many of our academic leaders in the early development of adult education came from continuing education units. As of 2009, however, few of our adult education professors and senior graduate students have robust connections with continuing education units. The number of colleagues from continuing education units who are regularly seen at CASAE (Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education) meetings can be counted on the fingers of two hands; the numbers of CASAE members who show up at CAUCE (Canadian Association for University Continuing Education) conferences can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Dimensions of
University-Community Engagement

As the current generation of university strategic plans in Canada is released, it is notable that language around university-community engagement has become more prominent. The University of Victoria speaks of civic engagement; other universities use other expressions. The previous notion of a "third mission" for higher education (teaching, research, and community service), with its narrower and separate realm of community service, is being replaced by a variety of ways to express community engagement that cut across both the research and the teaching functions.

Carleton University's Ted Jackson has conceptualized what he calls the "CUE (Community-University Engagement) Factor" (2008, p. 1). According to Jackson, the dynamic triangle of community-university engagement is framed by community-based experiential or service learning, community-based research, and community-based continuing education. Community engagement involves the interaction of a variety of forms of engagement, both with each other and with the academic mission of universities. Continuing education is the basis of all forms of community engagement and still represents arguably the most profound set of community partnerships. It is as diverse and multi-faceted as the human imagination. In Canada, the fields of service learning, community-service learning, and experiential-service learning have grown considerably over the past 10 years. Service learning is experiential learning for students—students learn off-campus through action projects with community groups. One of the better-known program's is the University of British Columbia's Learning Exchange, in which undergraduate students have opportunities to work in Vancouver's downtown east side. However, the Canadian Alliance for Community Service Learning lists 26 service-learning programs in universities and colleges in every region of the country. Jackson calls on universities across Canada to "increase their CUE factors by deepening and broadening their teaching, research, and volunteering activities with the external constituencies that have the greatest need for sustainable solutions to the challenges they face every day"(p. 1).

The Literature of
University-Community Engagement

Ernest Boyer of the Carnegie Foundation laid down some of the early conceptual foundations of university-community engagement in his theory of "engaged scholarship" (1996). More recently, the Carnegie Foundation has offered what is the most widely adopted definition of engagement: "Community engagement describes the collaboration between institutions

of higher education and their larger communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (Boyer 1996). In 1999, the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities (Kellogg Commission, 1999) proposed a shift from the terms *research*, *teaching* and *service* to the use of the words *discovery*, *learning* and *engagement*. This emphasis on the concept of reciprocity has led to a strikingly different approach to the mission of the university. Indeed, universities no longer separate and set apart their focus on knowledge creation (i.e., research) from the other scholarly functions of the institution. Discovery and learning happen in all aspects of university work—from basic sciences to new approaches to HIV/AIDS—and in classrooms, laboratories, businesses, and not-for-profit organizations.

Susan Ostrander (2004) studied civic engagement on five campuses in the United States during 2001; based on her study, she articulated a number of components that are necessary for effective engagement. David Watson, former vice-chancellor of Brighton University, initiated a robust Community-University Partnership Programme (CUPP) at his university. Watson is also one of the most persuasive and eloquent spokespersons for the links between lifelong learning, communities, and university engagement (see Watson, 2007; Watson & Maddison, 2005; Watson, 2008; Watson, 2009). Angie Hart, current academic director of CUPP, has added much to our understanding of how community engagement works and has contributed some useful ideas on how to evaluate the impact of this work (Hart, 2007; 2008).

After reviewing community-engagement approaches used by universities in the United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, India, Japan, Vietnam, Thailand, Philippines, Australia, United States, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, and South Africa, Barbara Holland and Judith Ramaley of the University of Western Sidney and Winnona State University, respectively, created a typology of how universities approach the university-community change agenda. They identified the planning, leadership, engagement strategies, and accountability frameworks of the institutions, but perhaps their most stimulating contribution was their conceptualization of the different approaches to the engagement process that were taken by the universities they studied. They noted three different approaches: routine, strategic, and transformative. Routine approaches to change occur when challenges can best be met by applying established and well-known solutions. Issues that require more planning and coordination call for strategic approaches to change. Transformative approaches to change are necessary when complex demands require a significant expansion of individual and institutional capacities and new ways of working together (Holland, 2008, p. 42). A combination of these three approaches may well achieve the kinds of robust new ways of working that will allow our universities and our communities to tackle the complicated issues ahead.

Community-Based Research

Kerry Strand (2003) provided one of the most widely shared definitions of community-based research:

> Community-based research (CBR) involves research done by community groups with or without the involvement of a university. In relation with the university, CBR is a collaborative enterprise between academics and community members. CBR seeks to democratize knowledge creation by validating multiple sources of knowledge and promoting the use of multiple methods of discovery and dissemination. The goal of CBR is social action (broadly defined) for the purpose of achieving (directly or indirectly) social change and social justice. (p. 5)

Community-based research has a particularly strong Canadian history and specificity, in addition to a lengthy association with the field of adult and continuing education. In the mid-1970s, a group of researchers based in Toronto and associated with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) and the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) created the Participatory Research Project. Under the auspices of this project, Hall, Jackson, Marino, Barndt, Conchelos, and others experienced a range of community-based research in Canada and other parts of the world. They were supported by the late J. Roby Kidd and James Draper, who were professors in the Adult Education Department of OISE; Dr. Kidd was also the first secretary-general of the newly launched ICAE (Hall, 2005). Inspired in part by this early work and by the experience of the Science Shops in the Netherlands, in 1998 Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council created the SSHRC-Community University Research Alliance (CURA) funding structure. The CURA model is now known throughout the world and has given rise to a unique meeting space called the Community-University Expositions (CUexpos), which have taken place in Saskatoon (2003), Winnipeg (2005), and Victoria (2008). Out of this combined energy has come the recently created Community-Based Research Canada (CBRC) and the Global Alliance for Community-Engaged Research (see http://www.uvic.ca/ocbr for more information).

Within our universities, CBR is becoming institutionalized. In January 2007, the University of Victoria created the Office of Community-Based Research as a university-wide structure that reports to the Vice-President, Research (see http://uvic.ca/ocbr). The Harris Centre at Memorial University serves a similar function throughout Newfoundland and Labrador (Fitzpatrick, 2008). The Trent Centre for Community Education, the Institute for CBR at Vancouver Island University, the Community-University Partnership program at the University of Alberta, the Centre for Community-Based Research in Kitchener, the Centre for Community

Research, Learning and Action at Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, the Services aux Collectivités at UQAM (Université du Québec à Montréal), and others have sprung up across the country. York University has created a knowledge mobilization unit, known as Research Impact, which has many of the features of the other models.

Continuing Education: Toward an Agenda for Action

So what is worth fighting for? Where do we put our energies? Opportunities to act will vary college by college and university by university, depending on how the CUE factor is developing and how our continuing education units are placed within the influence structures of our institutions. However, research on what has worked provides some suggestions for action.

The emergence of community-based research as a recognized and legitimate approach to knowledge exchange and action offers significant opportunities to participate in research and knowledge mobilization. Strengthening the research profile of continuing education within our universities and across the country would go a long way toward bridging the perception gap between continuing education units and universities. A specific research strategy would allow us to develop a strong base of evidence that we could contribute to the engagement strategy supported by our institutions. Increasing and enhancing the role we play in interdisciplinary research teams and in SSHRC-CURA proposals, as well as identifying a research leader or coordinator in each of our continuing education units (where one does not exist), would be important steps toward our goal. Some of our continuing education units already engage in research; all of our units engage in approaches to market research, program evaluation, and impact assessment. For units with no identified research functions, invitations can be extended to master's and doctoral students from any part of the university, and staff can watch for opportunities for units to become part of larger interdisciplinary projects that are underway in the community.

Research alliances and research chairs are another direction worth pursuing. David Livingstone at OISE/UT is the only Canada Research Chair in Lifelong Learning. There should be others. Why can't a continuing education unit collaborate with an education or a social sciences faculty to make a case for a chair in Learning and Society, in Learning and Sustainable Communities, or in Learning, Health, and Aging? The University of Calgary has created the Urban Alliance with the City of Calgary. The Office of Community-Based Research at the University of Victoria is co-chaired by the CEO of the United Way of Greater Victoria. The Community-University Institute for Social Research at the University of Saskatchewan also has

a community co-chair. The Continuing Studies unit at the University of Victoria is working closely with the Office of Community-Based Research on a variety of CBR and engagement skills development projects in Victoria and on Vancouver Island. Knowledge mobilization, knowledge transfer, knowledge translation, and knowledge exchange are the current focus of our granting councils, all of which want to see research make as much impact on policy as possible. Knowledge mobilization is about processes—public participation, translating ideas into accessible language, working with media, social-networking strategies, podcasting—and creating conditions for learning about new approaches to knowledge. These are foundational principles for adult and continuing educators.

Another option worth considering may already be in motion in some jurisdictions: our continuing education leaders should initiate and/or play an active role in university-wide discussions, task forces, or committees on university-community engagement or civic engagement. Continuing education has so much to bring to the table, and the new spirit of current community-engagement discussions may offer us opportunities to put our views forward. Similarly, initiating community-consultation processes on the role of the university in the solution of community issues shows promise. For example, the University of Victoria recently convened a forum on homelessness and housing affordability, with government, university, and community agencies together in the same room.

Bridging the gap between academic adult education and the structures of university continuing education is another area for potential impact in the context of new university-community engagement strategies. The University of Glasgow's Department of Adult and Continuing Education combines the functions of an academic research and teaching unit in adult and continuing education with a continuing education function; at one time the model for most of the adult education efforts throughout the United Kingdom, it has largely disappeared from other British universities. Nonetheless, that does not preclude the relatively few adult education academic units in Canada from forging closer links with existing continuing education offerings. In universities with no adult education academic units but with one or two adult educators more or less isolated in a sea of K-12 education, creating a kind of hybrid academic linkage might prove to be effective. Links to teaching and learning or faculty development centres and/or co-op and service-learning sectors are yet another angle to explore.

Strengthening the links between continuing education and a wide variety of community, regional, national, and international networks also has much to commend it. For example, we can join in efforts to create university-wide structures to support Aboriginal programming and linkages. Aboriginal communities are all major users of adult education and, in western Canada,

they are a growing population. Aboriginal peoples bring skills and perspectives that can help our institutions learn to engage with communities more respectfully.

Taking an active role in theory and practice spaces that have developed around community-based research, such as Community-University Expositions (http://cuexpo08.ca), Community-Based Research Canada (http://www.uvic.ca/ocbr), the Living Knowledge Network (http://www.scienceshops.org), and Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (http://www.ccph.info), is still another area for increased visibility. Similarly, spurring your university to support international initiatives related to community engagement and to the changing role of the university in society is worth considering. The Talloires Declaration (http://www.tufts.edu/talloiresnetwork) and the Global University Network for Innovation (http://www.guni-rmies.net) are both free and provide access to fascinating networks of energy and action.

Some Final Thoughts

David Watson (2009) writes of the challenge universities face in establishing an appropriate balance between intellectual rigour and respect for experience (p. 102). He illustrates his concerns using Thomas Hardy's novel *Jude the Obscure* (1895/1995). Jude, a stonemason who had wanted to attend Oxford University, begins to understand the differences between the knowledge of the community and the knowledge of the academy: "He [Jude] began to see that town life was a book of humanity infinitely more palpitating, varied and compendious than the gown-life" (p. 118). Although the university had excluded him and his community-based knowledge, Jude says, "Perhaps it will soon wake up and be generous. I pray so!" (p. 320). Today, the increasing interest in community engagement at the highest levels of our universities is evidence that our universities have indeed awakened and that Jude's knowledge of the community is being recognized as vital to the work of the institution.

Community or civic engagement is deep in the fabric of Canadian higher and continuing education—from the early days of the Extension Department of the University of Alberta to the fabled and storied Antigonish Movement from St. Francis Xavier, the links between the Worker's Education Association and the University of Toronto in the 1930s, and the Living Room Learning of the University of British Columbia in the 1950s. The ways in which universities engage with communities are currently being redefined; in the end, the words we use to describe the process may be different. Many new players have become involved in civic and community engagement and, given the strength of the forces that lie behind the changes that are

taking place, more players will come forward. Continuing education and continuing educators are perfectly placed to be central to these transformations and, like Jude, I pray that will be so!

Community-based research and community-service learning add to the rich and varied resources, skills, capacities, and imagination already present in the field of continuing education in Canada. Despite the demise of continuing education units at some of our universities, the Canadian Association for University Continuing Education remains the most robust of the three elements that form the dynamic triangle of community engagement. Hundreds of thousands of adult learners still take a bewildering array of courses, including such direct social justice offerings as University 101 at the University of Victoria or the offerings of its many sister programs across the country, where street people and marginalized persons are taking university-level courses for the first time in their lives. There are stories of institutional courage, innovation, and effective community engagement in every continuing studies unit in Canada. This pool of historical memory and practical "how-to" information is not only invaluable but also necessary and central to contemporary Canadian universities finding their way forward to meet the current challenges.

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Biography

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