

Everything Old is New Again: The Importance of Engagement to University-based Adult Education in Canada

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"The modern state university is a people's institution. The people demand knowledge shall not be the concern of scholar's alone. The uplifting of the whole people shall be its final goal" Henry Marshall Tory, University of Alberta, 1908

"There is an international convergence of interest on issues about the purposes of the universities and colleges and their role in a wider society. Much of this is structured around perceptions of the vital role of higher education in both sophisticated and developing knowledge economies. Meanwhile there has been a dearth of scholarly attention to the practice (as opposed to the rhetoric) of civic engagement by universities and colleges in various cultural contexts", Sir David Watson, Institute of Education, London, 2007

Adult Education as a university matter in Canada traces its roots to the British Extramural tradition that is associated with 19th century developments at Cambridge University. The creation of the Department of Extension at the University of Alberta in 1913 by the founding President, Dr. Henry Marshall Tory was the first major institutional commitment. Extension and continuing education units became a part of normal knowledge architecture as universities opened up across the country. The Extension unit at St. Francis Xavier was the base for the Antigonish Movement. McGill University's Extension unit at St Anne de Bellevue in 1938 created the organized radio listening group approach, which eventually led to the Farm Radio Forum and the Citizen's Forum. The University of Toronto was the administrative home of the Worker's Education Association in the 1930s and the University of Saskatchewan was linked similarly to robust community engagement and learning opportunities.

Research into adult education in Canada began to develop more quickly with the creation of adult education academic units in the 1960s that generated a need for research on the Canadian experience. The Universities of British Columbia and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education were the first two academic departments to be created. Throughout the 70s and 80s adult education became an accepted part of university academic life associated with the professionalization of the field of adult education. And while there have been a series of administrative cuts to universities that have effected adult education departments, the academic field of adult education in Canada continues to be a dynamic and important space. The creation of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education in the early 1980s has been the organizing lifeline for the field and its journal, the means by which we most often share our research findings.

In 1998, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council created a new form of research grant that signaled the beginning of a newer era of engaged

research. Drawing inspiration from the Service aux Collectives experiences in Quebec Universities and the theory and practices of participatory research in English-speaking Canada, the Community University Research Alliance (CURA) required a partnership between community organizations and academics. The CURA grant has become over the several years of its life, the most competitive of all SSHRC grants as it struck a chord amongst scholars who had been longing to find support for action oriented community-based research.

The Université de Québec à Montréal pioneered the idea of a university-wide structure for the support of community-based research and other forms of community engagement. The Service aux Collectivités was created in the 1970s and continues to flourish to this day. In English-speaking Canada, the creation of specialized structures to support research and other forms of engagement are more recent. Memorial University has the Harris Centre. The University of Victoria created an Office of Community-Based Research (www.uvic.ca/ocbr). The University of Alberta has given the engaged scholarship leadership to the Faculty of Extension. York University has a Knowledge Mobilization unit. The Community-University Exposition conferences have been held three times (Saskatchewan, Manitoba and British Columbia) bring 500-600 'engaged' scholars together each time.

Community-university engagement is arguably the strongest new theme cutting across all our university campuses these days. There has been a veritable explosion of writing on community-university engagement over the past five to six years. Ernest Boyer laid down the conceptual foundations with his development of the concept of "engaged scholarship" (1996). The Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities (Kellogg Commission 1999) shifted the terms *research*, *teaching* and *serve* to the words *discovery*, *learning* and *engagement*. Susan Ostrander from Tufts University did a study of civil engagement on five campuses in the United States during 2001, which resulted in the articulation of a number of necessary components for effective engagement. (Ostrander, 2004).

David Watson former Vice-Chancellor of Brighton University initiated a robust Community-University Partnership Programme (CUPP) at his university, but in addition is one of the most persuasive and eloquent spokespersons for the links between lifelong learning, communities and university engagement. (Watson 2007; Watson and 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 some useful ideas about how to evaluate the impact of this work. (Hart, Maddison and Wolff 2007; Hart, Northmore and Gerhardt, 2007). Barbara Holland and Judith Ramaley of University of Western Sidney and Winona State University respectively have reviewed community engagement approaches in the UK, Spain, Germany, India, Japan, Vietnam, Thailand, Philippines, Australia, USA, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and South Africa and have created a typology of how Universities approach the change associated with the community-university change agenda (2008). At the Canadian Association for University Continuing Education national conference and in their journal, I have elaborated the opportunities for Canadian continuing education (Hall, 2009).

Engagement, citizenship, democratic practice, recognition of the knowledge creating capacities of all peoples in diverse ways has been at the heart of our Canadian scholarly discourse. Please read this piece as an invitation for us to find out more about the engagement strategies in our various universities, to bring our theory and practice to bear on this newly emerging way of institutional thinking, to find ways to support these efforts and to make sure that they serve the communities where we are located. At a national level, Community-Based Research Canada, CBRC, (www.communityresearchcanada.ca) is a way to follow national developments. An exciting new intellectual and practical space in the form of the Knowledge Commons Initiative (www.knowledgecommons.ning.com) was launched in June of 2010. At the global level, the Global Alliance on Community Engaged Research, GACER, was launched in May of 2008 and shares the CBRC website.

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