

Towards A Knowledge Democracy Movement

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Summary

Based on a comparative international research project looking at community-university research partnerships, the paper links adult education theory and practice with the emerging literature in community-based research and makes a case for a 'knowledge democracy movement' as a way of understanding how knowledge, social movements and learning contribute to citizenship and social change. Drawn from life and moving towards hope.

Background

In the city where I live, Victoria, Canada, a wealthy city in a wealthy country, there are 1500 women and men (in a population of 250,000) who do not have a place to sleep at night. In spite of the creation of the Coalition Against Homelessness, the numbers of people who suffer from poor health, violence, substance abuse as a result of poverty and homelessness continues at about the same level. In India one of the fastest growing economies in the world, 600 million people live without literacy, adequate water and sanitation, poor health facilities and insecure food security. Indigenous people in North and South America, Africa and Asia have dramatically lower life expectancy and higher levels of health difficulties than the non-indigenous members of their communities. Their languages are disappearing daily and with the languages, extraordinary parts of our human knowledge base and culture. Climate change is having a more dramatic impact on the poor and marginalized persons in all our communities; one only has to look at the earthquake in Haiti or the floods in Pakistan to see how natural disasters impact the poor. The neo-liberal global economic machine produces wealth in historically unheard of quantities but exacerbates the gap between the rich and the poor both within nations and amongst nations.

These situations exist in spite of bodies of recent quality research on the impacts of inequality in our lives at both local and global levels. According to Wilkinson and Pickett, on almost every index of quality of life, or wellness, or deprivation, there is a strong correlation between a country's level of economic equality and its social outcomes. Almost always, Japan and the Scandinavian countries with less disparity between the rich and the poor have more positive social and health outcomes. The UK, the US and Portugal, which have high disparities between the rich, and the poor have poor results. What is so powerful in their research is evidence that both the rich and the poor fare better in societies with less inequality. (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009)

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore some of the discourses and trends in Higher Education Institutions expressed by such concepts such as engaged scholarship (Boyer, 2006), community-based research (Strand et al., 2003), community-university research partnerships (Hall, 2009a,

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Hart et al., 2007), community-university engagement (Watson, 2007), civic engagement (University of Victoria strategic plan), or knowledge mobilization and knowledge impact (Levesque, 2008)? What are the driving forces behind or within these trends? What kinds of structures and networks are emerging to support this work? What are the opportunities and dangers implied? Can these structures support the traditions of libratory and transformative pedagogies and practices inspired by Freire and the early work done in participatory research? How do these trends relate to the broad contemporary discourses of action research or participatory action research? Does the space that is opening within Universities provide an opportunity to recognize alternative sites of knowledge construction such as social movements, community organizations, the poor, homeless, and the excluded themselves? Does the focus on knowledge examine the contributions of broader ways of knowing such as Indigenous Forms of Knowing? Is there a possibility of a global knowledge movement? If so what would have to happen? In this piece, I focus on the dimensions of the higher education and engagement trends worldwide with a particular focus on research partnership and knowledge exchange developments, some of the dimensions of the community-based research movement within Canada, a look at the University of Victoria's Office for Community-Based Research and some thoughts on the potential emergence of a global knowledge movement.

A Knowledge Democracy Movement?

John Gaventa, a theoretician on power and citizenship, a pioneering participatory research leader, Chair of Oxfam UK and Senior Scholar at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex was the first person in my experience to speak of social movements using a 'knowledge strategy' as their core political organising strategy. (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008) His early work at Highlander Research and Education Centre in Appalachian Mountain region of the United States involved among other things the support of citizen researchers to go to local courthouses to find out the ownership of local coalmines. Absentee landlords owned all of the mines in question from as far away as New York or London. And while profits were good, taxes were very low for these absentee landlords so that resources were not sufficient to cover the costs of good schools, health services or other social services to allow the mine workers and their families to flourish. These citizen researchers using what John called a "knowledge strategy" for organizing, pooled their knowledge across six or seven Appalachian states and produced an important study on mine ownership, which had an impact on changing tax structures in some of the states in question. Highlander and Gaventa were later to move into a campaign for environmental justice using many of the same principles (Cable & Benson, 1993)

How can we understand a concept like a knowledge democracy movement? First I am working on an assumption that social movements remain at the heart of local and global change; that they are critically important sources of power to shift the way that people imagine various relations of power. With that argument I am building on the very long tradition of learning and social movement theory and practice including much that I have written about in earlier forms (Hall, 2009c). I am not referring to engaged scholarship or HE and community engagement itself as a movement, although there are movement elements to the ways in which community university partnerships are expanding. I am also not using other words to speak about the 'knowledge economy'. The knowledge economy specifically links knowledge production of certain types and skill development in certain ranges of skill development to global capitalist production and distribution mediated often through the digital technologies.

A 'knowledge democracy movement' is an action-oriented formation that recognizes, gives visibility to and strengthens the knowledge that is created in the context of, as Marx said, people trying to 'change the world'. A knowledge democracy movement recognizes, values and supports the recovery and deepening of indigenous ways of knowing (Wangoola, 2002) Williams & Tanaka, 2009). A global knowledge movement recognizes the epistemic privilege of the homeless themselves as a key to taking in action on issues of homelessness. It would celebrate the intellectual contributions of young people who are differently abled. It would honour the early work of Engels gathering the insights of workers in the 19th century factories of Manchester, England or Marx's work in the Moselle river valley of Germany learning from workers in the vineyards. It would recognize that the Gay and Lesbian movement and the HIV/AIDS movements have been built fundamentally on the knowledge of Gay and Lesbian citizens themselves.

A knowledge movement or a movement that uses knowledge as a key mobilising and organising strategy is centred within the lives and places of those who are seeking recognition of their rights, their land claims, access to jobs, ecological justice, recovery or retention of their languages. Knowledge itself within such a movement formation is most likely place-based and rooted in the daily lives of people who increase their knowledge of their own contexts and by sharing what they are learning with allies and others like themselves move, as Paulo Freire says, towards being agents in the naming of the world. The proliferation of discourse and practices within the world of community-university knowledge partnerships, in this conceptualisation, would be contributors to the broader knowledge movement. The extensive and important access to information developments would also be supportive of and a contributor towards a variety of knowledge movements, but neither the access to information developments nor the community-university engagement advancements form a global knowledge movement by themselves, but would be part of the necessary conditions for knowledge movements to gain footholds and flourish.

Contestation for influence within Higher Education

Community-university engagement is one of the strongest trends cutting across 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" (2006). 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 an eloquent spokesperson for the links between lifelong learning, communities and university engagement. (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 some useful ideas about how to evaluate the impact of this work (Hart, Maddison and Wolff 2007; Hart, Northmore, & Gerhardt, 2008). Barbara Holland and Judith Ramaley of University of Western Sidney and Winnona 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. They identify the planning, leadership, engagement strategies, accountability frameworks and more of institutions taking routine, strategic or transformative approaches to the engagement process. (Holland & Ramaley, 2008). Lorraine McIlrath and Iain Mac Labhrainn of the National University of Ireland, Galway and leaders of the Community Knowledge Initiative have pulled together a very useful collection of papers of international perspectives on Higher Education and Civic Engagement. (McIlrath & Mac Labhrainn, 2007).

There are so many examples of recently created community university structures in other parts of the world. Spain for example has seen the Instituto Paulo Freire; a national community-university research network has its organizational base in several Spanish Universities including Valencia, Gerona and Sevilla¹. CREA, the Centre for theories and practice in Overcoming Inequalities, was one of the sources of inspiration for the University of Victoria when it started its Office of Community-Based Research. Professor Emilio Lucio-Villegas holds the Cátedra Paulo Freire at the Universidad de Sevilla. The Cátedra located within the Faculty of Education, is a hub for community-university participatory research throughout the region.

Not all of the structures or organizations that facilitate the creation of community-university partnerships are located within universities. It is critically important to note that much of the early history of community-based research, participatory research and similar approaches originated within and/or were supported by civil society organisation. If we look at the Science Shop Movement in Europe for example one will find a majority of the Science Shops are based in Universities, but not all. The Bonn Science Shop is a cooperative non-governmental organisation that had its origins in a university, but found that it had much more freedom for progressive research and social action when located as an independent community organisation. It works never the less as do other Science Shops, linking university students and researchers with community activists and organisations that need research to be done.

The Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) based in New Delhi, India is nearing 30 years of operations. Its motto is 'knowledge is power'. It is legally structured as a non-governmental civil society organisation. PRIA carries out research with communities of excluded and oppressed people. It provides capacity-building workshops and training opportunities for local government workers and grass roots NGO workers in participatory research and evaluation. It works on issues of citizenship and governance, on health and safety in the workplace, on sustainability and local economic development and in local planning. Because of its long-term skills and reputation for ethical and democratic research approaches, universities in India have sought PRIA out to provide teaching and field placement opportunities for students who are going in to work in rural areas, in fields of social work or as community-based researchers. They broker community-university research partnerships but from the community side of things.

In Canada, the Community Based Research Centre was established nearly 25 years ago as a local non-governmental organization. It has grown over the years to have a staff of 25-30 persons working on behalf of community organisations to serve their research and evaluation needs. They work on issues of anti-racism and multicultural health, employment and cultural issues. They draw on the resources of several universities in the Waterloo region of Ontario

(about 1 1/2 hours west of Toronto). In May of 2011 they will have hosted the 4th Community University Exposition a national and international space for community and university partners to meet to share with othersⁱⁱ.

Canadian Developments

In Canada, Edward Jackson at Carleton University has conceptualized what he calls the “CUE (Community-University Engagement) Factor”. He writes of the dynamic triangle of community-university engagement being, community-based experiential learning, community-based research and community-based continuing education. He 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”(Jackson, 2008).

One of the three legs of the Jackson’s CUE Factor, community-based research (CBR), has a particularly strong Canadian history and specificity. In the mid-1970s a group of researchers based in Toronto and associated with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and the International Council for Adult Education created a group called the participatory research project. Hall, Jackson, Marino, Barndt, Conchelos and others had a variety of community-based research experiences in Canada and other parts of the world. They were supported by the late Drs. J. Roby Kidd and James Draper who were Professors in the Adult Education Department at OISE and in the case of Dr. Kidd, the Secretary-General of the newly launched International Council for Adult Education (Hall, 2005).

Inspired in part by Canada's early work in participatory and community-based research and by the experience of the Science Shops in the Netherlands, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council created the SSHRC-Community University Research Alliance (CURA) funding structure. The CURA model has become known widely throughout the world and has resulted in rise of a unique meeting space called the Community-University Expositions (CUexpos) which have now taken place in Saskatoon in 2003, Winnipeg in 2005 and Victoria in 2008. Out of this combined energy has come the recently created Community-Based Research Canada (CBRC) and the Global Alliance for Community-Engaged Researchⁱⁱⁱ. Within our universities, CBR has begun to become to be institutionalized. The University of Victoria in January of 2007 created the Office of Community-Based Research as a university-wide structure reporting to the Vice-President of Research. The Harris Centre at Memorial University in Newfoundland serves a similar function throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. The Trent Centre for Community Education, the Institute for CBR at Vancouver Island University, the Community University Partnership Programme 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 the Université de Québec à Montréal and others have sprung up across the country.

The Office of Community-Based Research at the University of Victoria

The Office of Community-Based Research at the University of Victoria exists to facilitate collaborative community-university research partnerships that enhance the quality of life and the economic, environmental and social well being of communities. It is located administratively within the office of the Vice-President, Research and has a Steering Committee that is co-chaired by the Vice-President, Research and the Executive Director of the United Way of

Greater Victoria. The OCBR is a small unit with a part-time Director who is a senior academic, a part-time Associate Director with a community organising background and a full-time administrative coordinator.

The work that the OCBR has given the most attention to during its first years of activity include linking researchers, activists and policy makers engaged in issues such as homelessness and housing affordability, local food production and distribution, Indigenous language revitalization, health and adult learning needs. The OCBR has a regular series highlighting Indigenous Research Methods with community researchers as key. It also works with instructors at the University of Victoria to facilitate sharing of how best to teach community based research in the undergraduate and graduate levels.

The Vancouver Island Community Research Alliance (VICRA)

VICRA is an alliance of the five post-secondary educational institutions located on Vancouver Island. They are united via a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by the respective President's of each of the five institutions. The five campuses include: The University of Victoria, Royal Road's University, Vancouver Island University, Camosun College and North Island College. The MOU calls on the group to: (1) identify priority research issues with an island wide focus;(2) develop and implement a process to identify relevant and available knowledge, information, skills, and capacities both in the Parties and in communities (3) identify and develop research partnerships and share information on best practices that can be shared with others;(4) promote the engagement of the Parties' students in action research projects identified by communities/community members; (5) build capacity for community-based research and evidence-based planning among the spectrum of organisations and agencies that work to address the needs of Vancouver Island residents and communities;(6) build on each other's experiences and expertise, drawing on lessons from local, national and global networks/projects.

During 2008 and 2009, we worked with communities up and down the island to see what common issues there were that our VICRA team might be able to address. Three areas emerged from these consultations, Aboriginal Health disparities, and lack of affordable housing and concerns about the sustainability and security of our food sources. In June of 2010, with a grant from the Canadian Social Science and Humanities Research Council, our VICRA team began work on a Local Food Production and Distribution Action Plan, a project that we proposed calling "Bringing the Food Home". VICRA will support the development of five "Local Food Production and Distribution" tables in various parts of the Island. With student CBR research interns from each of our campuses and research support from a team of distinguished food policy researchers, business people, organic farmers, chefs, food distributors, local government folks and others will sit together to decide how to remove the obstacles to local food production and distribution. Actions envisaged are the creation of a venture capital pool for small-scale farm producers, new solutions to food inspection sites and regulations, support for farm markets, better links to food wholesalers, and more.

Global Alliance on Community-Engaged Research

At the Global level, the European-based Living Knowledge Network, the Society for Participatory Research in Asia and Community-Based Research Canada have come together with a number of other regional CBR networks to create the *Global Alliance on Community*

Based Research (GACER). Civil society and non-governmental research bodies such as the Canadian Community-Based Research Centre in Ontario, the Bonn Science Shop in Germany, the Centro Boliviano de Estudios Multidisciplinario in Bolivia, the Society for Participatory Research in Asia and the Mpambo Afrikan Multiversity in Uganda are important examples of the kinds of organizations that are needed.

GACER has initiated four key activities to date: a launch of the statement of principles; advocacy within the United Nations World Conference on Higher Education; a global study of the potential impact of community-university research partnerships on issues such as poverty and sustainability and the creation of a global communiqué on the role of community university research engagement as a strategic element in the development of higher education everywhere.

Elements of a Knowledge Democracy Movement

There is unmistakable evidence of two major institutional trends within the world of knowledge generation and use. The first is the emergence of the 'knowledge access movement'. These developments are driven in part by the professional worlds of information technology located within libraries and digital repositories and in part by the explosion of digital information technologies. The Public Knowledge project based at the Universities of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University and Stanford University is one such expression. The research and software development of the Public Knowledge Project, which provides software for open access globally accessible electronic journals, is focused on improving the scholarly quality of publishing processes. It also seeks to expand the realm of public education by improving social science's contribution to public knowledge, in the belief that such a contribution is critical to academic freedom, the public use of reason, and deliberative forms of democracy. Its research program is investigating the social, economic, and technical issues entailed in the use of online infrastructure and knowledge management strategies to improve both the scholarly quality and public accessibility and coherence of this body of knowledge in a sustainable and globally accessible form^{iv}.

The second is the emergence or re-emergence of new discourses, practices and structures for knowledge mobilization, engaged scholarship, community-based research, and community-university research partnerships as illustrated by the work being done in Canada and the specific case of the University of Victoria. These newer developments are part of a broader turn of attention by Higher Education institutions all over the world to the impact of their presence in the communities and regions where they are located. Community or Civic engagement is becoming a normal aspiration to be mentioned in the strategic plans of universities. Vice-Presidencies for Engagement, Offices of Community Outreach, Office of Community-Based Research, Knowledge Mobilization Units, Community-University Partnership Programmes are but a few of the ways that these approaches are being institutionalised.

The strongest tendency in both these knowledge democracy developments is to see as a central value, the dissemination and impact of scholarly, academic, scientific or expert knowledge. Research granting agencies want to make sure that the public investments being made in research produce tangible results for society. Most of the stakeholders, whether academic staff or students, university administrators, or research funders operate from the assumption that knowledge is produced by scholars in universities and research institutes and that the benefits of

this knowledge production, as a point of public morality or public accountability needs to benefit society. And it is critically important to support and acknowledge the extraordinary value of fundamental science to our understandings the way the world works whether in fields of physics or medicine or engineering or environmental science. The purpose of this argument is not to argue against this role of science or this role of the university. But if we are to see the advancements of a global knowledge movement or increased support for knowledge strategies within social movements, there is a third dimension that is needed.

The third leg of a knowledge democracy movement if it is to emerge more strongly has to be recognition that critically important knowledge is created in different ways and in different locations. As Eyerman and Jamison have noted in their study of social movements social movements are formations that create what they call 'cognitive praxis' (1991). Peter Levine speaks of the creation of public knowledge"...The process of creating public knowledge as an additional good, because such work builds social capital, strengthens communities and gives people skills that they need for effective citizenship. If this is correct than we should aim to include as many people (and ways of knowing) in the collaborative creation of "free" or open access knowledge...ordinary people should be recognized as knowledge creators." (2007).

From a study of a biocultural approach to a Traditional Knowledge Commons established by 80 traditional healers living in the Mpumalanga province in South Africa we have the following, "Knowledge is an outcome of virtuous relationships with the land, the plants and the animals. It is not property to be bought and sold. It is simultaneously cultural and spiritual and its movement and application promotes a kind of virtuous cohesiveness"

The Honey Bee Network that originated in India and is designed to document and share indigenous theory and practice has spread to 75 countries. This knowledge movement builds on the metaphor of the honeybee that collects pollen without impoverishing the flowers, and it connect flower to flower through pollination. The idea is that when we collect knowledge of people we should ensure that people don't become poorer after sharing their insights with us.

The gift giving cultures of the Western Canadian Indigenous peoples demonstrate that we grow and benefit an economy where wealth moves through our communities as a continuously flowing gift. Just as the objective of a gift economy is to increase value through the movement of wealth, the objective of a knowledge movement is to increase value and well being through the continuous gifting of knowledge.

We will not realize a transformative knowledge movement either locally or on a global scale, until recognition of the knowledge generating spaces outside the academy are recognized, until non-university organizations are able to access research funding, until the research and knowledge mobilization capacities of local community organisations and social movements are strengthened and until a larger voice from the community, the movements or democratic society can be heard within the development of the many institutional forms of knowledge and engagement that are evolving, but I believe that a strong argument can be made that pathways towards a knowledge democracy movement are being made. I further believe that the theory and practice of the rich history of the education of adult in the contexts of citizenship, social movements, transformation, place and social contexts have much to contribute as well as much to draw from.

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ⁱ www.paulofreireinstitute.org

ⁱⁱ www.cuexpo2011.ca

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.uvic.ca.ca/ocbr>

^{iv} <http://pkp.sfu.ca>