

## **Participatory Research:**

### **Canadian Adult Educators Build a Global Movement**

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#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to ensure that scholars and practitioners of community-based research and community engagement are aware of the important contributions played by Canadian adult educators in the development of the international participatory-research movement over 40 years ago. Lessons learned from that effort are useful for future leaders in the field of adult education as they chart their course in the decades ahead. The chapter covers the Canadian origins of participatory research, early definitions, developments over the years, an historic timeline, contemporary expressions, lessons learned, and conclusions.

#### **Origins**

As a specific term, participatory research emerged from the Global South of the 1960s and '70s. In addition to the powerful influence of Brazilian Paulo Freire's (1971) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, its roots can be traced to Tanzania, where the work of Marja Liisa Swantz, Marjorie Mbilinyi, Budd Hall, Yusuf Kassam, and others found fault with positivism, arguing that the dominant research paradigms of the day treated people as objects of research, remained distant from any practical help to people and communities, and functioned mostly as faculty career enhancements within the narrow confines of academia

In recent years, Canadian academics have heard much about community-based research, engaged scholarship, *recherche partenariale*, and related approaches. While these trends are sometimes

traced to Ernest Boyer, the former president of the Carnegie Foundation, and his work on the “scholarship of engagement” in the United States (Boyer, 2006), in fact, the Canadian adult education community played a much earlier, and very significant, developmental role in the theory and practice of participatory research in Canada and across the globe.

Participatory research first gained visibility in Canada in the last half of the 1970s. As co-founders in 1976, with the late dian marino, of the Participatory Research Group (PRG), the authors were deeply involved in this work. Based in Toronto at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, the PRG was established as the Canadian hub of the International Participatory Research Network, which was launched in 1978. The PRG and the Network then constituted the research arm of the non-profit International Council for Adult Education (ICAE). The ICAE was founded by the late J. Roby Kidd in 1973 and was based in Toronto for about 30 years. Roby Kidd was also the founder of the OISE Department of Adult Education in 1965.

Upon leaving Tanzania, Hall spent time at the Institute of Development Studies in England and realized that concerns that he and others had found in Tanzania were shared by activist intellectuals in, among other places, India, Colombia, the Philippines, and working-class activist circles in the United Kingdom. A special issue of the ICAE’s adult education journal at the time, *Convergence*, on the subject of participatory research (PR), put the language and ideas of PR on the international intellectual map. The seminal article in this special issue was written by Hall and titled “Participatory Research: An Approach for Change” (Hall, 1975).

## **Definitions**

The first international meeting on participatory research was held in Aurora, Ontario, in September 1977, to develop a common framework for local initiatives and a joint multi-year budget. At that

meeting, we set out the definition of participatory research agreed upon by the participants there—who would become the inaugural regional coordinators of the international network in Dar es Salaam, New Delhi, Caracas, Cairo, London, and Toronto—as follows:

1. Participatory research involves a whole range of powerless groups of people—exploited, the poor, the oppressed, and the marginal.
2. It involves the full and active participation of the community in the entire research process.
3. The subject of the research originates in the community itself and the problem is defined, analyzed, and solved by the community.
4. The ultimate goal is the radical transformation of social reality and the improvement of the lives of the people themselves. The beneficiaries of the research are the members of the community.
5. The process of participatory research can create a greater awareness of the people of their own resources and support their mobilization for self-reliant development.
6. It is a more scientific method of research in that the participation of the community in the research process facilitates a more accurate and authentic analysis of social reality.
7. The researcher is a committed participant and learner in the process of research, that is, a militant rather than a detached observer.

The definition put forward by the PRG was:

PR is a democratic and political approach to investigation and learning to be taken up by individuals, groups, and movements as a tool for social change. It strives to play a liberating role in the learning process by promoting the development of a critical understanding of

social problems, their structural causes, and possibilities to overcome them. It does not claim to be neutral. As a research approach it calls for democratic interaction between researchers and those among whom the research is conducted. These objectives are not easily accomplished. Thus critical analysis in terms of both short- and long-term goals is essential and must be an ongoing and integral component of our work. (Hall, 1977)

## **Momentum**

By 1982, the PRG described itself as a “non-profit collective of adult educators and research workers.” The group was involved in community development, literacy, English as a Second Language, and evaluation activities. It worked with labour, Indigenous (then called Native) organizations, immigrant associations, women’s groups, and other community groups. PRG was one of six groups working in various parts of the world that were affiliated with the Participatory Research Program of the ICAE. Each group was autonomous and committed to building an international network of activist adult educators and researchers.

From the outset, supported by grants, contracts, research assistantships, and experiential courses at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) of the University of Toronto, and anchored in its close partnerships with community, labour, and Indigenous organizations, the PRG team generated a robust program of conference presentations, working papers, and journal articles on the theory and practice of participatory research in Canada and internationally (e.g. Dubell, 1981; Etherington, 1979; Jackson, 1978; Jackson, McCaskill, & Hall, 1982; Kidd & Byram, 1979; marino, 1980). Budd Hall, Ted Jackson, Deborah Barndt, Lynda Yanz, and Alfred Jean-Baptiste served, in succession, as coordinators of PRG. Group members included, at various times, Martin Byram, Greg Conchelos, Diane Correa, Alan Etherington, Ross Kidd, Linzi Manicom, dian

marino, Erma Stultz, Kathy Tobias, and Alan Vigoda. The developmental years benefited from a relatively even gender balance among the early practitioners. Women played a strong leadership role in many of the social movements beyond the women's movements themselves. dian marino, one of the founders of the original Participatory Research Group, was an artist. She influenced the group to take up what we would now call arts-informed research methods. Deborah Barndt, an early member, brought a remarkable ability with photography to the work of the group. For a full decade, this productive momentum was sustained by some two dozen talented and committed team members, resulting in an array of prominent publications and innovative projects and courses well into the 1990s. These contributions, initially incubated on an adult education "platform," extended into popular education, popular arts and culture, food studies, women's studies, primary health care, program evaluation, Indigenous studies, labour studies, communications studies, development studies, and sociology (see Barndt, 1991; Jackson and Kassam, 1998; marino, 1998; Park, Brydon-Miller, Hall, & Jackson, 1993).

### **Developments over the Years**

The first decade of efforts by PRG to advance participatory research from its base in Toronto should be viewed within a longer timeline of history on campus-community partnership. It is useful to divide the history of engaged scholarship in Canada into three distinct periods: The first period entailed the "early years," prior to the creation of the Community-University Research Alliances (CURAs) of the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada (SSHRC). The second period was demarcated by the years 1998 and 2012, when the CURA program was expanded by SSHRC and focused on the recovery, revitalization, growth, and institutionalization of engaged scholarship. The third, and current, period began in 2012, with the Governor General's delivery at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences on Knowledge Democracy (Johnston, 2012).

## <H2>Early Years

In spite of the absence of adult education discourse per se, participatory research offered a natural way of working among the early practitioners of Canadian adult education. At the heart of both participatory research and adult education are the adult education principles of respect for the experience of adult learners and starting where learners are at are. Some of the earliest organizations, which practised what we would call participatory research, included Frontier College (founded in 1899), the University of Alberta Extension Department (1912), the Antigonish Movement at St. Francis Xavier University (1930s–1960s), the Workers' Education Association with links to the University of Toronto (1930s) and *Service aux Collectivites* at the L'Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) (1970s). The planting of the seeds of participatory research from the anti-colonial struggles of the Global South to Toronto at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (1970s and 1980s) found itself in the midst of the rise of new social movements such as efforts by the gay and lesbian community to control HIV/AIDS research (1980s), women's movements linking knowledge to taking action for health and against violence and poverty, anti-racist movements, and Indigenous self-determination (1970s and 1980s).

Prior to 1998, the engaged scholarship movement was largely located outside the walls of academia, but adult educators, social workers, community development scholars, and others working from Canadian universities had a long record of individual commitments and linkages to the social movements of the times. Canada has always had a deep and politically oriented practice with engaged scholars working in the labour movements, the anti-apartheid movements, and many other locations. During these early years there were, however, no formal courses on participatory research, no deans of engaged learning, no degree programs and, in fact, few mainstream academics were involved at all.

## **<H2>The Community University Research Alliance (CURA) Model**

In 1998, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council created the CURA grant. Inspired by the early participatory research traditions, the Quebec university experiences and the Dutch Science Shop movement of the late 1970s and 1980s, CURA funding marked the beginning of a new era. Academics whose ideological or epistemological preferences were aligned with community groups, to listening to their issues and concerns, and co-constructing knowledge flooded the SSHRC offices with proposals, which were for the first time products of alliances between scholars based in universities and scholar-intellectuals located in community groups. So great was the interest in CURA grants and the pent-up demand for funding of this nature that the SSHRC CURA grants soon became the most competitive of any of the SSHRC program offerings. Meanwhile, Canadian scholars, with their civil-society allies, continued to refine the theory and methods of participatory research and evaluation (e.g., Chevalier & Buckles, 2008; van de Sande & Schwartz, 2011; Whitmore, 1998), including on the ethics of research undertaken with Indigenous communities (Castellano, 2010; Inter-Agency Secretariat, 2010).

## **<H2>Current Period**

It was the CURA program at SSHRC that laid the contemporary foundations of engaged scholarship practices in Canada. Two SSHRC presidents were especially supportive of partnered research, notably Marc Renaud and Chad Gaffield; council staff who were key to advancing the CURAs and their successor programs included Peter Norman Levesque, Eric Bastien, and Gail Zboch.

Some institutions, such as the University of Victoria, have been inspired by the work of innovators like the Community-University Partnership Program at the University of Brighton in England or

the CREA Centre in Barcelona, Spain. Others, such as Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN), have built their engagement strategies on their own institutional history of community-university partnerships based on the now defunct MUN Extension. By the end of 2019 some 50 to 60 Canadian universities either have engaged scholarship written into their strategic plans, have a university-wide structure to support engaged scholarship, or both. For example, Simon Fraser University (SFU) calls itself “Canada’s most engaged university” in its public branding, highlighting engaged research, engaged communities, and engaged students (SFU, n.d.). This vision statement has led to significant increases in academic, student, and staff interactions in both downtown Vancouver and in the dynamic SFU Surrey campus. Similar language has been taken up across Canada in both universities and community colleges.

At the national level, there are several networks, including Community-Based Research Canada, Research Impact, Community Campus Engage Canada, and Réseau Recherche-Action Francophone. In English-speaking Canada, the Community University Exposition or (after 2015) Community College University Exposition (C2UExpo) has been held roughly every two years since 2003. C2U Expos bring together community, college, and university research partners in roughly equal numbers. C2U Expos attract on average 500 to 600 participants.

### **Timeline on the Development of Participatory Research**

[COMP: Please set this up as a timeline, rather than a bullet list, with dates to the left and each event starting with a cap.]

- 1975 Special edition of *Convergence on Participatory Research* published
- 1976 International Conference on Adult Education and Development held in Dar es Salaam

- 1976 Paulo Freire lectures at OISE
- 1977 Participatory Research Group formed at OISE/UToronto
- 1978 Launch of International Participatory Research Network of ICAE
- 1978 Publications on PR in United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and UNICEF
- 1979 Service aux Collectivites at UQAM founded
- 1980 First international conference on participatory research, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia
- 1982 Special issue on community-based research in *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*
- 1993 Publication of *Voices of Change*, first academic book on PR in Canada and the US
- 1996 *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Report*, which used a PR approach
- 1998 Publication of Knowledge Shared on international participatory evaluation
- 1998 CURA Program launched at SSHRC
- 2003 First CUExpo held at University of Saskatchewan
- 2006 Office of Community-Based Research established at the University of Victoria
- 2006 Launch of Social Analysis System Project at Carleton University with IDRC funding
- 2008 CUExpo 2008 held at University of Victoria
- 2008 Community-Based Research Canada launched
- 2009 The Oxygen of Community report published at Carleton University

- 2010 Tri-Council policy on research with Aboriginal Peoples published
- 2011 CUExpo 2011 held in Kitchener-Waterloo
- 2011 New SSHRC architecture for Partnership Research Program introduced
- 2012 Governor General delivers paper on knowledge democracy at Congress
- 2012 Launch of New UNESCO Chair at University of Victoria and PRIA, New Delhi
- 2012 Launch of SSHRC-funded CFICE Project at Carleton University
- 2013 CUExpo 2011 held at Corner Brook, Newfoundland
- 2014 First text on teaching community-based research published (Etmanski, Hall, & Dawson, 2014)
- 2015 C2UExpo 2015 held at Carleton University
- 2015 SSHRC announces new initiative on Indigenous research partnerships
- 2017 C2UExpo 2017 held at Simon Fraser University
- 2017 McConnell Foundation-Simon Fraser University Initiative on Social Infrastructure starts
- 2019 CFICE completes its work, enables launch of Community Campus Engage Canada

### **Contemporary Practice**

In 2012, the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) created a joint Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. The

UNESCO Higher Education division had learned about the work of Budd Hall and Rajesh Tandon who, in 2008, created the Global Alliance on Community Engaged Research. UNESCO was seeking a new chair in higher education and invited these two individuals to apply for a UNESCO Chair. As it happened, they were located at a Northern University (Hall-UVic) and a Southern NGO (Tandon-PRIA) The co-chairs undertook two global studies to establish the state of the art in the field (Hall, Tandon, & Tremblay, 2015; Tandon, Hall, & Lepore, 2016). From this work came a set of principles for teaching community-based research derived from the study of practices in many parts of the world. These principles are:

1. Orientation toward research ethics and values
2. Deep understanding of power and partnerships
3. Incorporation of multiple modes of inquiry
4. Ensuring a balance between the classroom and the field
5. Developing critical and reflexive researchers (Tandon et al., 2016)

In addition to the theoretical and practical knowledge that emerged from their initial studies, in mid-2017, the co-chairs launched the Knowledge for Change (K4C) Consortium for Training of Community-Based Participatory Research. The goal of the K4C is to build institutional capacity for training the next generation of participatory researchers in the Global South and what they call the “excluded” North. K4C employs a training-of-trainers model with a 21-week online course jointly delivered by the University of Victoria and the Society for Participatory Research in Asia. By late 2018, the initiative had established K4C hubs in South Africa, India (two), Malaysia (two),

Indonesia, Canada (Salish Sea K4C Hub, Victoria area), Colombia, Cuba, Italy, Ireland, Uganda, and Tanzania.

The first Canadian community-based research training structure was the Salish Sea K4C Hub, located on Coast and Straits Salish First Nations territory. It is a partnership between the Faculty of Social Science at the University of Victoria, the Victoria Native Friendship Association, and the Victoria Foundation. The Salish Sea K4C Hub team also has strong links with the Surrey Campus of Simon Fraser University in the nearby Vancouver region, which itself has created significant partnerships with community organizations and movements in Surrey. Crystal Tremblay, Advisor on Engaged Scholarship at the University of Victoria, leads the Salish Hub team, which in 2020 consists of Tanya Clement, Ruth Mojeeb, Sebastien Silva, and Walter Lepore.

It was also in 2012 that the Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement (CFICE) project, based at Carleton University, began its seven-year journey to explore and advance community-campus partnerships aimed at shifting the centre of power, control, and direction away from the academy and toward community organizations. The founding members of the CFICE team in 2012 included Peter Andrée, Patricia Ballamingie, Todd Barr, Geri Briggs, Nicole Bedford, Cathy Edwards, Genevieve Harrison, Ted Jackson, the late Cathleen Kneen, Diana Majury, Kim Pate, Karen Schwartz, Liz Weaver, and Bessa Whitmore, with advice from Katherine Graham, Kim Matheson, Tim Simboli, and others inside and outside Carleton University. With multi-year funding from SSHRC's new Partnership Program and contributions from Carleton and other partners, CFICE was organized into five hubs co-led by engaged scholars from Carleton and key leaders in major non-profit organizations:

- Poverty reduction, co-led with the Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement and its Vibrant Communities initiative
- Food security, co-led with Food Secure Canada
- Community environmental sustainability, co-led with the non-profit Trent Centre for Community-Based Education
- Violence against women, co-led with the National Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies
- Knowledge mobilization, co-led with the Canadian Alliance for Community Service Learning

In turn, the hubs reached out to other partners, generating more than 60 partnered sub-projects across seven provinces and in the process creating opportunities for about 100 graduate students in a dozen fields. After its first four years, CFICE shifted its emphasis to the promotion of institutional and government policy change. The project also hosted the 2015 Community, College and University Exposition at Carleton University, with support from four foundations and SSHRC, attracting 300 delegates and providing a venue for SSHRC to announce a new initiative to support Indigenous research partnerships.

By early 2019, CFICE had catalyzed a wide range of publications (e.g., Jackson & Khanenko-Friesen, 2016; Levkoe et al., 2016; Pei, Felthan, Ford, & Schwartz, 2015)—including a special issue of *The Engaged Scholar* exploring insights for theory and practice arising from CFICE's experience (Andrée, Findlay, & Peacock, 2018)—as well as new courses, follow-on research projects, and innovative policy proposals at the institutional, provincial, and federal levels. Further, with the UNESCO Chair and others, CFICE helped to establish a new, pan-Canadian network,

Community Campus Engage Canada, animating its start-up process with a series of well-attended webinars, to take the work forward.

## **Impact**

Perhaps the authors are too embedded in this movement to realistically assess its impact. Looking back over the past half-century, have we overestimated the impact of the adoption and spread of participatory research and community-based research? There are certainly clear limits to what has been achieved. The evolving complexity and contradictions of the notion of “community” itself continue to challenge all actors in this space (see Andrée et al., 2018). For example, barriers must be reduced to amplifying the knowledge and priorities of Indigenous women and youth, including LGBTQ+ and trans people, in reconciliation, education, and sustainable-development efforts across Canada. In the academy, despite many important gains, a critical mass of incentives and core budget allocations to deepen community engagement has not been won. In addition, with some exceptions, most Canadian governments still underutilize and underfund PR/CBR programs.

Nonetheless, it is reasonable to conclude that the efforts by Canadian adult educators in the 1970s to establish and animate a platform for the international participatory-research movement contributed very significantly to a robust, global knowledge-democracy movement. Today a Google search of “participatory research” yields 29 million hits and one for “community-based research” more than 800 million hits. Across the arc of time and diverse geographies and disciplines, the engaged scholars and reflective civil-society leaders in this space have worked with heads of state and heads of social movements; become ambassadors, university presidents and deans; developed innovative national research policies; drafted new institutional strategies; and created hundreds of new research networks and centres, courses, projects, books, and toolkits. The

ability to generate impacts at the macro, meso, and micro levels, simultaneously and interactively, has been a permanent strength of our movement.

However, as in other fields, progress is more dialectical than linear. On a global level, the economic forces of greed and inequality and the political forces of authoritarianism and hate are well-resourced by extremist movements and anti-democratic states, and are also continuously learning and adapting (Hertel-Fernandez, Tervo, & Skocpol, 2018). As we drafted this chapter, the Highlander Center in Tennessee—long a leader and ally in this work—was the target of arson by White supremacists. Our efforts have not stopped attacks like this by the far right or other extremists. Knowledge and democracy continue to interact in powerful ways. Adult educators and others continue to be needed to help prepare the next generation of leaders and mentors to advance this struggle and to reimagine and recreate participatory research and CBR to meet evolving challenges and exploit new opportunities in the interests of democracy, fairness, and sustainability.

## **Lessons**

Looking ahead, what lessons can be drawn from this 50-year experience that could be useful to future advocates, theorists, and practitioners of knowledge democracy and of adult education?

Three lessons seem especially relevant:

1. Context matters: Just as the PRG worked within the Cold War political economy of the 1970s, forging alliances with social movements and community organizations fighting for rights and democracy, so will the participatory researchers of the future. Among the forces likely to shape their context—and the issues faced by marginalized peoples around the world—in the years ahead are continued climate migration, the surveillance state and big

tech, and changes to work and livelihoods driven by artificial intelligence amid the rivalries between a diminished West and an ascendant, anti-democratic China.

2. There is power in multi-level, multi-sector action: As the design of the early platform for participatory research intended, PRG worked on multiple levels vertically: local, institutional, national, and international. It also worked, horizontally, across sectors, movements, and disciplines. In some ways, today's (and tomorrow's) technology makes doing this easier, faster, and more seamless, but the participatory researchers and adult educators of the future will have to choose their issues and allies strategically and focus their work. With both colonial and pluralistic traditions, Canada provided sufficient democratic space within which PRG members could optimize their efforts.
  
3. Post-secondary institutions offer institutional stability—and leverage: As PRG found in the 1970s, while there are bureaucratic rigidities and self-serving cultures in universities and colleges, their legitimacy, multi-generational human resources, and solid financial-management systems make them stable, productive hosts for PR/CBR practitioners. For an in-depth look at issues involved in higher education structures supporting participatory research, our book on *Knowledge, Democracy and Action* is an important source (Hall et al, 2013) At least in the foreseeable future, grants, contracts, and research assistantships will be important to the success of future participatory researchers and adult educators while they and their partners seek deeper, broader institutional and policy change.

The next half-century of participatory research promises to be even more dynamic and significant than the past fifty years. With the support and guidance of the emerging scholars and practitioners preparing now to serve as mentors, future generations of knowledge-democracy advocates and adult educators will need to continuously build and renew the capacities necessary to confront opponents of fairness and opportunity, and to support, in ever more effective ways, progressive organizations working for change.

## **Conclusion**

The founding and development of the Participatory Research Group in the 1970s constituted an important moment in the history of Canadian adult education. Learning from, and in alliance with, the Global South, the PRG helped to facilitate the spread of the international participatory research movement while also partnering with local Indigenous, immigrant, and labour groups. Today, community engagement is a strategic goal of many post-secondary institutions, and community-based research is widely practised across many fields and disciplines.

Yet the struggle to decisively change these institutions and public policy more broadly continues. As they proceed forward, knowledge-democracy advocates and adult educators may wish to return to the core principles of participatory research, particularly the integration of learning and action, critical analysis of social problems, and democratic interaction between researchers and the communities engaged. These principles are as relevant and alive as they ever were. For its part, adult education is well-positioned to reassert its pivotal role in the knowledge-democracy movement. There is much important work to be done.

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