

Book Review

Ronaldo Munck, Lorraine McIlrath, Budd Hall, & Rajesh Tandon (Eds.). (2014)
Higher Education and Community-Based Research: Creating a Global Vision.
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In turn, it follows that 'community-based research' cannot be research that is guided by economic return, hierarchy, or rankings, or be such as to treat people as a means to knowledge. But further, community-based research too cannot be research that merely advances academic interests or even just results in epistemological gains. Plainly, community-based research is research that is founded on an interest in the well-being of the community. But, as intimated, what more it is—or might be—is still an open matter.

Barnett, in Munck, McIlrath, Hall, & Tandon (2014), p. 190

Community-based research (CBR) includes university researchers and community members in collaborations directed toward social change (Strand et al., 2003). The editors of *Higher Education and Community-Based Research: Creating a Global Vision* recognize the complexity in this apparently simple definition. This excellent book provides a thorough, substantial examination of the values, assumptions, policies, and practices associated with CBR in a variety of international contexts. Included in the chapters are multiple lessons in history, politics, economics, and other disciplines. The authors address important questions about universities, communities, and knowledge creation. These discussions are timely, and anyone interested in truly grappling with CBR during this time of evaluation and revised expectations about education and society will benefit from reading it.

The book opens with an excellent preview chapter that is recommended for any reader. Next, the first full section, titled "Overview," includes four chapters devoted to general descriptive information about CBR and the technical issues associated with this strategy. In Chapter 2, Munck describes the basic genealogy of CBR, such as Participatory Action Research (PAR) in Latin America, participatory rural appraisal (PRA) in Africa, and action research and the development of the cooperative extension system in the United States. Munck also discusses "knowledge paradigms" (p. 18) and opens the discussion about aspects of CBR that are explored again later in the book, such as participation, community, and knowledge generation, and starts the conversation about the overall contemporary university context of the commodification of knowledge. Munck believes that CBR can have a powerful role in the transformation of

the university and suggests, “another knowledge is possible and another university is possible” (p. 25). The reader finishes the chapter with informed optimism about CBR.

In Chapter 3, Liston addresses the nature and challenges of “participation” in participative research methodologies and the characteristics of knowledge so obtained. Liston describes the “flexible linear” (p. 34) approach to understanding research findings from participative approaches. The author suggests that researchers approach the context of CBR as a “complex adaptive system” (p. 35) to further the understanding of the CBR model. The author appreciates the nonlinear, emergent aspects of CBR as potential opportunity for interdisciplinary learning and the development of new research methodologies. The framing of this complexity is optimistic without being naïve.

The fourth chapter brings CBR into the health and wellness research setting. Mullett describes three major community development research projects. All projects included teams of practitioners and researchers and included the development of theoretical frameworks and reflective practices. The author includes important details of the complex processes involved in CBR. For example, the first project, an analysis of speech support mechanisms provided through clinical services, involved the analysis of multiple sources of data (e.g., interviews with parents and practitioners, diaries), the involvement of various teams with specific skills, and a willingness on the part of all for deep commitment. This last factor necessitated ongoing, frequent conversation among all participants and a general openness to the complex and emergent nature of the findings. These collaborative strategies are time-consuming and difficult but

are essential for CBR to result in meaningful knowledge and potentially new structures.

Chapter 5 reminds the reader of the deep international intellectual, political, and social roots of CBR. Tandon and Hall describe important influences on the current model of CBR and articulate their own leadership in evolving these practices in Latin America and Asia. Readers new to CBR may be humbled by the long-term dedication to the democracy of knowledge evidenced here. The authors close this chapter—and the first section of the book—with challenges for contemporary researchers about supporting the growth of CBR.

The second section of the book, “Experiences,” contains seven chapters that articulate specific CBR agendas, strategies, and approaches across the world. Together, these chapters illustrate that participatory research takes place in many forms, resulting in research “products” and structures that are uniquely tied to the issue at hand. The actual research questions, methods, and procedures are strongly impacted by institutional processes and supports at the local, regional, or national level. For example, in Chapter 6, Steinhaus describes the “science shops” movement, largely in Europe, in which researchers (sometimes, but not always, affiliated with universities) provide collaborative research services with individuals to share scientific information and involve greater public participation in research and science. The international networks possible among science shops, and their various connections to institutes of higher education, reflect ongoing discussion about the optimal strategies for relevant knowledge generation. Similarly, in Chapter 7, Duncan and Manners describe the “strongly polarized and contested” (p. 85) views on the roles of

universities within changing societal/political/economic expectations and demands in the United Kingdom. They identify three cogent themes that capture the complexity of these collaborations. These themes concern our understanding of the engagement processes between researchers and communities, the “governance and political economy of engagement,” and our articulation of the impact of the engagement itself (p. 97). This coherent section of this chapter could serve as the organizer for this entire book.

The next four chapters of the “Experience” section are also extremely strong. Each includes important discussions of relevant policy and practices that have emerged on various levels in light of changing social and political needs and expectations of universities. Each chapter contains examples of institutional strategies and case studies, as follows: Australia (Cuthill, Chapter 9), US land-grant universities and Los Angeles (Peters & Avila, Chapter 10), South Africa (Bawa, Chapter 11), and Latin America (Gutberlet, Tremblay, & Moraes, Chapter 12). Each chapter in this Experience section is packed with substance and personal experiences of the authors, who are themselves deeply committed to this work.

Finally, far from being simply summative, the third section of this book, “Perspectives,” includes three engaging chapters. In Chapter 13, Barnett notes that even the term “based” in “community-based research” is unclear (p. 183) and reminds the reader that many, many terms and assumptions should be articulated:

Arising from the opening questions are matters of power, validation, authority, academic freedom, institutional autonomy, knowledge production, knowledge

management, and knowledge distribution. The terms community and research are, of course, themselves hostages for fortune and would warrant examination (and perhaps “community” has been disinterred more in this volume than “research”). Not far behind are matters of knowledge ethics—as we may term it—and knowledge responsibilities. (p. 184)

The author goes on to describe a theoretical “ecological university” (p. 191), whose activities are fundamentally directed toward “enhancing society and personal well-being” (p. 192). The author suggests that we move away from the term “community-based research” and proposes alternatives, such as “community-sensitive” and “community-transacted” research (p. 197). Next, Chapter 14 includes a provocative discussion of the “public good” and its relationship to a number of constituents/factors, such as a knowledge economy and market ideologies and changing public values. The book’s final chapter is written by the editors. This short piece includes succinct, coherent challenges towards developing opportunities and strategies for the democratization of new knowledge. These lists are especially useful since they are logically connected to a series of strong, clear belief statements about the role of new knowledge in meeting major persistent challenges, such as “growing inequality between and within nations” (p. 217).

In conclusion, this book reminds us that CBR has a complicated international history and deep intellectual, political, and social underpinnings. CBR comes in many forms, involves individuals and groups from a variety of places in collaboration, and can be extremely time-consuming. Institutional structures, including

government, impact the resources available to pursue participative research models, and ideologies about the interactions and connections between education and societal needs further influence the direction and purpose of this kind of work.

The editors have done an excellent job of collecting pieces from experienced individuals, many of whom have significant expertise with collaborative models, inside and outside the university. The contributors have a great deal to say. Because of the depth of each chapter and the overlapping concern with several central issues, the three sections—actually, the fifteen chapters!—can be read in various orders. I do recommend reading the final chapter first.

Higher Education and Community-Based Research: Creating a Global Vision may not be the best resource for an individual or group in the early stages of learning about CBR; other texts may be more appropriate (e.g., Strand et al., 2003). This book is not a how-to guide, but is, instead, a rich accounting of how long and what lengths were necessary for institutions to grow and knowledge to be collected and shared democratically. In fact, this

book is not essential to *do* CBR. As faculty, we can teach CBR classes and mentor student CBR projects without reading this book. Never having read the book, we can build alliances and university-situated structures designed to further engagement. In community organizations, we can work with faculty on discrete projects or join university-led coalitions. We can *do* CBR projects without this book. But for the individual or group who is ready to *live* CBR—for those who have “tested the waters” and are unsatisfied with the prevailing paradigm of research—this book is essential reading. Furthermore, anyone working on strategic planning or visioning that includes *any* emphasis on CBR should consult this book and learn from these experienced individuals.

References

- Strand, K., Marullo, S., Cutforth, N., Stoecker, R. & Donohue, P. (2003). *Community-based research and higher education: Principles and Practices*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.