Bringing Academia to the Public Square:

Developing Interactive and Visible

Community-University Research Partnerships

by

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For the past 25 years, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) has granted monetary support primarily to academic researchers and students. Although the federal government's financial support to fund this research has increased from $99 million in 1995-96 to $197 million in 2003-04 (SSHRC, 2004, p 3), SSHRC wants to justify these research dollars and demonstrate the impact research in the social sciences and humanities can have on society in the 21st century. SSHRC uses a competitive funding process that relies upon research excellence as determined by rigorous, transparent peer review of refereed publications and presentations (SSHRC, 2004, p 10). These traditional means of disseminating research outcomes – often in relatively obscure, academic journals and conferences – are the benchmark upon which successful research proposals are judged, and the avenue for the researcher's ideas and thoughts to be affirmed within their discipline. This method of dissemination supports and regulates academic work, but the limited readership often prohibits the transference of information to the general public. SSHRC laments the fact that "the human sciences in Canada are a paradox of ubiquity and invisibility: present everywhere but, for all intents and purposes, visible almost no where" (SSHRC, 2004, p 12). As part of the renewal of the research council, SSHRC wants to ensure that research will be "transformed into shared knowledge" (SSHRC, 2004, p 10). In order to facilitate this, the original core values of SSHRC will include two new principles addressing the demand for knowledge: interactive engagement – larger, ongoing linkages and diverse partnerships – and maximum knowledge impact (SSHRC, 2004, p 10).

Marc Renaud, the former President of SSHRC, suggests that researchers must not only develop knowledge, they "must [also] become far more proficient at moving the

knowledge from research to action and, in the process, at linking up with a broad range of researchers and stakeholder-partners across the country" (SSHRC, 2004, p 3). One of the programs developed by SSHRC during the last few years is the Community-University Research Alliances, or CURA research grants. These grants encourage university researchers and community agencies to collaborate on research programs with impact beyond the walls of the academic institution. The CURA research grants started as a pilot project in 2000. After an intensive evaluation, SSHRC believes the CURA grants have been "spectacularly successful" at connecting the producers of knowledge with the users of knowledge (SSHRC, 2004, p 14). SSHRC expects these collaborative and relevant community based research programs to develop new and innovative strategies to demonstrate accountability and disseminate knowledge.

These expectations imply a number of challenges for the leaders of these research programs. Participants from varied and distinct disciplinary and professional perspectives will need to develop an interactive and collaborative research community. Research goals and activities will need to become more visible to the research partners and the general public in order to maximize the impact of knowledge and create a "greater capacity for understanding research and its applicability" (SSHRC, 2004, p 10). The focus of this inquiry involves an examination of educational theories associated with accountability and community development as a means to inform the development of interactive, publicly accountable community-based research programs. In particular, the following questions will be addressed:

1. To whom are community-based research programs accountable?

2. What is the rationale for developing an interactive research community among the research partners?

3. How can community-based research programs inform the public about their research activities?

Community-University Research Partnerships:

Demonstrating Accountability

SSHRC has always been committed to accountability through "good stewardship of public funds and open reporting" (SSHRC, 2005, p 14). The open reporting practices encouraged by SSHRC represent a form of bureaucratic accountability – researchers use standardized procedures to keep accurate records of their research activities (Kirby and Stecher, 2004). These same standardized practices also compel the research council itself to be accountable to the federal government for the tax dollars spent on research. Academic researchers also practice professional accountability (Kirby and Stecher, 2004) when they disseminate new knowledge through the publication of peer reviewed articles and presentations. Missing from this accountability framework to date is some form of public accountability associated with the development of new knowledge.

During the transformation process, non-academic organizations encouraged SSHRC to "expand the scope of all research and dissemination activities in order to increase the knowledge base of organizations both on and off campus…[and] adopt a comprehensive approach to mobilizing knowledge" (2005, p 11) . SSHRC is acknowledging this call for greater public awareness and accountability for research activities by encouraging researchers "to develop effective skills for communicating with the public" (SSHRC, 2005, p 12). As part of their discussion of accountability in

education, Sheila Kirby and Brian Stecher (2004) use the term market accountability to describe "the interaction between consumers (parents) and providers (schools) to regulate practice and ensure quality" (p 6). Kirby and Stecher maintain that bureaucratic, professional and market accountability models should not exist in isolation (2004, p 7). To a certain extent, this is the philosophy that SSHRC is now embracing as they call for greater communication with the general public – a form of market accountability – to supplement the bureaucratic and professional accountability already practiced by academic researchers.

This move toward public accountability for community-based research programs is paralleled by a similar philosophical shift in the recent literature about accountability in education. School administrators and teachers are recognizing more than ever that education is a "public good that affects everyone in the community" (Labaree qtd in Ridenour et al, 2001, p 72), "answerable to the public for what is taught and for the quality of the experiences provided to students" (Younge et al, 2002, p 11). Parents, students and local communities "must be seen as equal partners and stake holders who can work diligently with educators, school administrators, and policy-makers in a collective endeavour" (Dei et al, 1999, p 7).

Similar to education, research has often been considered a private activity conducted within the walls of the academy. Whenever research was conducted in the community, it usually consisted of activities that were done *to* someone rather than *with* someone. Generally speaking, the research process is slow – it can be many years between the onset of the research activity and the publication of results in academic journals. This makes it difficult for the average citizen to recognize how research

influences their lives. The results of research, usually shared among academics, often resemble the sort of statistical information that may or may not be understandable to the general public. With the onset of new community-based research programs, SSHRC is endorsing the view that information about research activities must move beyond the private, individual experience of the academic researcher's discipline. In order for newly developed knowledge to have genuine influence, the results or outcomes of research should be jointly developed.   Community-university research partnerships need to explore collaborative models of interaction and develop strategies to demonstrate public accountability, sharing their research story so the development of new knowledge can be "defined and affirmed in public space" (Taylor, 2004, p 105).

Interactive Engagement:

Developing a Research Community

One of SSHRC's new principles (or core values) to encourage better public accountability is interactive engagement – "larger, ongoing linkages and interactions through a mix of partnerships that span a diverse range of researchers, students, fields of activity, institutions, communities, regions, countries" (SSHRC, 2005, p 14). A leadership challenge for recipients of the CURA research grants, is the development of a research community among the research partners. This will involve bringing together a diverse group of people to develop a common set of beliefs and values (Anderson in Taylor, 1997, p 57) in order to construct a new social imaginary that defines "how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (Taylor, 2004, p 23). In essence, each participant in these large research

programs emerges from a different "community of practice".   Within each of these communities, there are conventional ways of getting things done. People learn how to belong in these communities by participating in their practices (Fasoli, 2003, p 39). They "extend, redirect, dismiss, reinterpret, modify or confirm – in a word, negotiate anew – the histories of meanings" (Wenger, 1998, pp 52-53). Given that "[w]e are socially embedded" (Taylor, 2004, p 65), participants in these new research programs must explore – through discussion and dialogue – the power relations and differing values associated with the research activities.

For the most part, discussions about research are usually conducted by academics. However, academic discussion is not the type of deliberation required in circumstances that will involve diverse perspectives for "[a]cademic discussion need not aim at justifying a practical decision, as deliberation must. Academic discussion is likely to be insensitive to the contexts of ordinary politics: the pressures of power, the problems of inequality, the demands of diversity, [and] the exigencies of persuasion" (Gutmann & Thompson, 1999, p. 3). When community partners are included in discussions about the research program, the dynamics of the group dialogue may favour the academics who are more accustomed to expressing complex ideas publicly.   It will be important, however, for academics and community partners to deliberate equally about the research partnership in order to advance their collaborative efforts. Opportunities for open, deliberative forums about the research program may support the inclusion of previously excluded voices – the community partners – into the discussion (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996, p. 42). Properly structured, these discussions or deliberations should allow for the equal participation of all members of the newly formed research community.

Open discussion and communication are becoming a fundamental aspect of educational philosophy.   Schools are encouraged "to develop communities of learning grounded in communities of democratic discourse" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p 53) as a means to develop capacity for school transformation. School managers and administrators are encouraged to value "the importance of connections among ideas, experiences, and people; the importance for deep learning; and the importance of relationships among teachers and students – the opportunities for them to create a learning community" (Darling-Hammond, Limits of Educational Bureaucracy, p 68). Of particular interest to community-based research programs is the relationship between the academics – usually seen as the creators of new knowledge – and the community partners or practitioners. These research partnerships will require constant dialogue for the development of new knowledge to be a "non-linear, interactive process" (Blackmore, 1995, p.10) with little distinction between theory and practice. Researchers should recognize that "the search for empirical generalizations 'in a world in which most effects are interactive' should give way to 'response sensitive' research, which takes exceptions seriously and makes continued adjustments on the basis of individual context specific responses" (Cronbach qtd in Darling-Hammond, 1997, p 48).

An understanding of the context in which practitioners operate is an important consideration for the eventual utilization of new knowledge. How knowledge is utilized and implemented in professional practice is a rapidly expanding field of research as universities and researchers are "under pressure to increase the utilization of research results by decision makers and society at large" (Landry et al, 2001, p 396). Rejean

Landry and his associates at Laval University have identified six stages of knowledge utilization:

1. transmission – research results are transmitted to the practitioners and professionals concerned;
2. cognition – research reports are read and understood by the practitioners and professionals concerned;
3. reference – the work is cited as a reference in reports, studies, and strategies of action elaborated by practitioners and professionals;
4. effort – practitioners and professionals make the effort to adopt the results of the research;
5. influence – research results influence the choice and decision of practitioners and professionals; and
6. application – research results give rise to applications and extension by the practitioners and professionals concerned (Landry et al, 2001, p 399).

Studies of social science research indicate that the likelihood of climbing the ladder of knowledge utilization is greatly increased if the "context within which the users of research operate" (Landry et al, 2001, p 413) is considered. Research activities that are truly collaborative – engaging community partners in meaningful discussions and working together to communicate goals and objectives of the research program – would enable academic researchers to fully understand the research users' context and needs, thereby creating greater possibility for knowledge utilization.

Maximum Knowledge Impact:

Making Research Visible

The second of SSHRC's new principles is maximum knowledge impact: SSHRC would like researchers to work with a range of interested parties – government, business and elsewhere – to build greater capacity for understanding research and its applicability (SSHRC, 2005, p 14). SSHRC elaborates on this principle by suggesting that "as important as peer-reviewed journals continue to be, as vehicles for expert discussion, they

cannot meet the needs of lay audiences. Researchers must also use new and different ways to share what they learn" (SSHRC, 2004, p 12). In essence, the leaders of these community-based research programs should not only implement the administrative aspects of leadership, they should also use educational strategies (Starratt, 2003, p 5) to make the research program visible and understandable. There is no doubt that the development of an interactive research community among the academic and community research partners will heighten awareness and knowledge about research with the community partners. The development of this research network could "...transform practice and create professional communities by inspiring [researchers and community partners] to solve problems, take risks, [and] assume ownership..." (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p 50). In the long run, these strong community relationships support academic researchers, for "the strengths of a university are also the product of the distinctive cultural characteristics of the population it draws on, and the network of relationships in which it is embedded" (Marginson & Considine, 2000, p. 246). Communication has long been considered an important pedagogical strategy. In Democracy and Education, John Dewey (1916) supports communication for its educative properties: "[s]ociety not only continues to exist *by* transmission, *by* communication, but it may fairly be said to exist *in* transmission, *in* communication" (p 4). Dewey goes on to state that "communication is like art. It may fairly be said, therefore, that any social arrangement that remains vitally social, or vitally shared, is educative to those who participate in it" (p 6).

At one time, teaching and research were considered a single function in university funding (Peters in Slaughter, 1998 p 60). Increasingly, research funding is also financed by the business and manufacturing sector. Consequently, teaching and research are now

often viewed as separate functions of the academic workload. The community-based research programs funded by SSHRC thus far are distinctive from industry and corporate financed research, which typically supports the development of potential profits for the commercial sector rather than the development of potential intellectual breakthroughs and contributions to the public good (Giroux, 2002). Community-university research programs funded by SSHRC, typically involve partnerships with small and large non-profit agencies, cultural organizations, non-governmental and government agencies, schools, and social service organizations. They are less about the money—academics are not required to find results compatible with company policy—and more about engaging the community in applied research activities while providing a service that supports the public good.

As part of SSHRC funded research programs, student researchers are given opportunities to support the applied research activities, de-mystifying the research process and contributing to student learning. Lee and Rhoads (2004) conclude that faculty in the applied fields—engineering, education, business, health sciences and fine arts (as freelance artists)—participate in more consulting activities, and score higher in their commitment to teaching. Although Lee and Rhoads do not explicitly define, nor give specific examples of what constitutes consulting activity, it can be inferred that this form of scholarly activity involves community organizations outside the walls of the academy in much the same way as the CURA research grants. According to Lee and Rhoads, these types of hands-on scholarly activities may provide greater insight during classroom instruction, allowing research activities to be integrated into the classroom environment. This aspect of the study by Lee and Rhoads requires a better description,

and the modest results certainly require further research. However, this conclusion does

provide an example of the pedagogical possibilities for research activities within the

university classroom thereby increasing the visibility, and potential knowledge impact, of

community-based research programs. Although Lee and Rhoads conclude that the

teaching and research dichotomy remains firmly entrenched at the research institutions,

they have opened the door for further (and necessary) studies on the types of research

activities that can be successfully integrated with teaching.

Within the education field, there is increasing interest in stronger connections

between school and community. In "Rethinking Educational Change: Going Deeper and

Wider in the Quest for Success," Andy Hargreaves (1997) notes that "[t]he struggle for

positive educational change must now move beyond the school in order to enrich what

goes on within it. *Cultural relationships* are founded on principles of openness and

collaboration developed collectively with groups of parents and others in the community

as a whole" (p 10-11). An excellent example of a visible community-school

collaboration is available in the schools of Reggio-Emilia, Italy. Over the past few

decades, these educational programs have been researching and experimenting with

innovative documentation strategies that have created a public and visible narrative of the

children's learning process. Documentation, in this case, is defined as verbal narrative

forms that include written or audio notes, observations, and journals about the

educational experiences, as well as visual representations such as artwork and photos. As

a means of recording the research process, "[d]ocumentation offers an opportunity for

revisiting, reflecting and interpreting. It provides occasions for self-organization and

group organization of knowledge" (Edwards et al, 1998, p 122).

In these educational settings, documentation is an important visible narrative, creating an overwhelmingly beautiful and meaningful space for both children and adults. The teachers believe these aesthetic displays tell "the story of the room" – the key to the learning taking place. This "story of the room" has moved beyond the private walls of the schools and into the public domain. This research story is being told again and again as part of two traveling exhibits, one in North America and one in Europe, recounting "through words, images, and objects – the complex reality of an educational experience covering more than thirty years (Spaggiari in Fillipini et al, 1996, p 13). The documentation gathered over the years as a means to research the learning process, has now become highly visible around the world, providing "traces that testify to the individual and group learning processes as they take place and evolve" (Rinaldi, 1998, p 7).

The 100 Languages Exhibit uses a combination of both visual and verbal representations to form a narrative that is readily accessible to the lay audience. Kirsten Dufour (2002) discusses how exhibits and displays are considered for their pedagogical possibilities in artistic practice:

> Since art is able to situate itself in new ways in different social and geographic settings, posing and investigating questions through its particular mode of meaning production, it is always trying to invent new forms by experimenting with new artistic strategies. By employing strategies that involve collaborations and communities, processes rather than products, artistic production in the social realm rather than in museums, artists are able to effect and challenge social realms beyond the specific context of art itself (p. 157).

Community-university research programs could learn from the 100 Languages Exhibit and artist researchers whose modes of inquiry for the purposes of representing ideas and concepts now include working outside of the institutions – in public space – where they

are addressing and making use of images to educate, and inspire thoughtful reflection. Community based research programs should consider the use of appropriate public space outside the walls of the academy to visibly display the developing narrative of the research process. Traveling exhibits or displays and websites move the research activities into the broader community – ensuring that all the research participants "have the possibility to see themselves from an outside point of view…" (Rinaldi, 1999, p 7).

Interactive and Visible Research:

Challenges and Considerations

Community-based research programs benefit from using the accountability framework that also informs interactive and community building activities in the field of education. In fact, public sharing of information about research programs should be viewed as more than an exercise in accountability – the interactive and visible elements of the research activities should also be considered as a pedagogical strategy to inform and educate about the specific goals and activities of local research endeavours, as well as research generally. The Small Cities CURA in Kamloops, British Columbia was the impetus for this analysis of philosophical foundations associated with the development of an interactive and publicly accountable community-based research program. Academic researchers studying the Cultural Future of Small Cities represent a variety of disciplines including English, visual and performing arts, education, sociology, and geography. The community partners include professionals from the municipal government, local schools, non-profit community and neighbourhood associations, and cultural organizations such as the art gallery and the museum. The Small Cities CURA employed a number of strategies – regular meetings, workshops, and panel discussions – to engage all of the

research partners, students, and the general public in a dialogue about the research themes. A display that featured each individual project in the research program traveled to conferences and was exhibited in the lobbies of several of the community partners. A website and extensive media coverage also supported the public visibility of the research activities to the local community.

The experience of the Small Cities CURA demonstrates that moving the research agenda beyond the walls of the academy will continue to represent a number of challenges and considerations. A common space exclusive to the research program – for displaying the research activities and discussions while they are in progress – may be required to effectively support the documentation of an evolving narrative in such a way that opinions and values of each participant are readily apparent and visible to everyone. Also, publicly sharing information about research activities in progress is a new concept for academic researchers who are unfamiliar with strategies to document the research process. In order to support the future practices of community-university research programs, it will become increasingly important for researchers associated with these community-based research partnerships to share their experiences and successful strategies to develop interactive research communities. Further studies to assess the utilization of newly developed knowledge by the community partners will also be required in order to fully determine knowledge impact. In the end, academic researchers must now strive to balance the ongoing need for peer reviewed publications with the development and implementation of new ways to create research communities that demonstrate public accountability while also disseminating the newly acquired knowledge to lay audiences.

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Appendix

Community-Based Research – A Case Study

As Carl Rinaldi walked across the university campus, he thought about the meeting that was about to take place. To be honest, he wasn't exactly sure what to expect. The large, community-based research program that he co-directed had been notified several months ago to expect a visit from the president and vice-president of the federally funded granting agency. This visit, he was told, was an evaluation of the 30 research programs funded as part of the community-university research alliances pilot project. For the most part, Carl felt some degree of confidence about the research activities during the initial year of funding. Developed as a partnership between the university and one of the large cultural agencies, the research program was designed to examine the role of culture in small cities. With one exception, all of the academic researchers were from the faculty of arts, representing a variety of disciplines including English, sociology, geography and visual arts. The community partners included most of the cultural organizations in the city, several social agencies, and the municipality. During the first year of the research program, Carl and the community co-director had both worked hard to develop a strong relationship among all of the academic and community researchers. A number of meetings had helped introduce each of the separate research projects, providing opportunities for all of the participants to explore their ideas about the role of culture in small cities.

This community-based research program is an example of one of the new research grants developed by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada. These Community-University Research Alliances, or CURA research grants,

encourage university researchers and community agencies to collaborate on research programs with impact beyond the walls of the academic institution. From the outset, Carl – as co-director and co-applicant for the research grant – believed the research program must be accountable to the community partners. At one of the first meetings with the academic researchers, he declared that each of the individual research projects must include a self-appraisal component as part of the research protocols. He recognized that this might present a challenge for many of the academics researchers. Traditionally, the dissemination of research outcomes has compelled academics to develop publications and presentations that are peer reviewed. These academic outcomes may not meet the needs of community agencies seeking immediate and practical solutions to their problems and concerns. It seemed apparent to Carl that through the CURA research grants, SSHRC was now encouraging academics to reach beyond their own discipline and embrace a wide variety of academic and community partnerships.

As the meeting was about to begin, Carl greeted each member of the research team – community representatives from the cultural organizations and the municipality, and several academic researchers were present to provide specific information about each individual research project. Two undergraduate students were also present to share information about their involvement as research assistants. Carl realized that over the past year, he had learned to respect the opinions and ideas of everybody associated with the research program. After the initial introductions, it became clear that the president of SSHRC was taking control of the morning's agenda. He began by asking some very pointed and thought provoking questions: "How will your research make a difference in this community? What will be the legacy of this research program?" One by one, each

of the participants provided information about their research activities thus far. For the most part, there were many positive comments about the growing relationships between the academic and community research partners. The president of SSHRC then stated that these community-based research programs were in jeopardy. Many of the academics at the research council were not happy with the CURA research grants. These more traditional academics believed that community research activities should not be funded by SSHRC. At the same time, the president stated he was constantly being challenged by politicians to justify how social sciences and humanities research activities were making an impact on the general public. "The good news for you is that the CURA research programs will continue to receive funding. As one of the original pilot projects, you will be able to apply for an additional two years of funding. Your proposal will be adjudicated by the usual process, so you must demonstrate your research program's success through refereed publications and presentations. At the same time, you must inform us how you have created new and different ways to share what you are learning. The fact of the matter is, last year SSHRC provided over $197 million for research. In Canada, research in the social sciences and humanities is present everywhere, but for all intents and purposes, visible almost no where. Answer me this, if I was to talk to people on the main street of this city today, would they know about this research program? Would they find the research activities relevant?" Good question, thought Carl. He was beginning to realize that as one of the principal investigators, it would be his job over the next year to inform and educate the general public about the activities and outcomes of this large, complex research program.

Questions:

1. To whom are community-based research programs accountable? How can they demonstrate accountability to the funding agency and the community partners?

2. How can community-based research programs develop and maintain communication among the academic and community researchers?

3. How can community-based research programs inform the public about their research activities?