

Research Students and Community Development: The Challenges of Integrating Academic Expectations with Community Needs and Values

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Abstract

While universities can play a major role in advancing research-based community development, academic discourses of rigor, quality and ethics often conflict with the participatory and collaborative approaches required by community development principles. While experienced academics often have difficulty negotiating these issues, they present greater challenges for research students whose work will ultimately be assessed on its “academic merit.” This paper suggests specific areas where change is required to allow research students to engage effectively with the community.

Community Development and Knowledge-based Institutions

The practice of community development comprises building organizations and networks at the local level with the aim of enabling people to participate more meaningfully in the practices and decisions which shape their social lives and environment—to use a somewhat glib shorthand, community development is concerned with “empowerment.” So, on the understanding that knowledge is power (Foucault 1977) community development can be understood to be inherently a knowledge-based practice; it relies on systematic discovery and recording of personal and local experience which can then be valorized and applied in practices directed at social change, such as public debate and policy advocacy. One of the principal ways in which community development contributes to progressive social change is through challenging the dominant construction of social life, based in dominant and conventional forms of knowledge and evidence, by bringing to bear previously unheard voices, experiences and interpretations of social reality.

Universities are also in the business of knowledge production, validation and transfer, and are particularly focused on training and accreditation of professional knowledge workers. Universities are central among the gatekeepers of knowledge production, skills transfer and knowledge validation. Thus, universities have a key role to play in community development processes, just as community development work is an

important training site for academic researchers (especially, but not exclusively, in the social sciences). Community developers, organizers and activists need research skills and skilled researchers, and universities are providers of both. As many commentators have pointed out, this can be seen as a “win-win,” especially where particular universities seek to highlight and develop an important role in their regional communities as a distinctive part of their mission. However, knowledge and power are not often so freely shared and distributed by powerful institutions and the situation regarding university-community collaboration in new knowledge generation is more complicated than it may at first appear—community development principles demand an approach to knowledge which is genuinely participatory, politically contextualized, and which closely links research to action. The question arises: Can powerful social institutions make a meaningful contribution to progressive social change? While we may desperately want to believe that they can, we also agree with Giddens’ observation (Lincoln and Cannella 2004, 6) that our institutions and organizations are more conservative than the individuals that make them up. In this paper we demonstrate some of the ways in which universities’ institutionalized research training and management practices contradict the basic principles of community development and make meaningful engagement extremely difficult, especially in situations where a participatory action research approach is taken, and we highlight the particular situation of those entering the academy as graduate research students. We go on to suggest some areas where universities’ academy practices require attention if they are to facilitate genuine empowerment of their regional community partners.

Knowledge, Power and Research

Foucault demonstrated the intimate relationship between knowledge and power, expressed in the concept of discourse. For Foucault, discourses are “bodies of knowledge,” a construct which refers not only to content (what is known) but also to the rules and practices of establishing knowledge and the language in which it is expressed and communicated (how things come to be known). Discourses are vehicles of knowledge and of power, reflecting the interests and agenda of those in a position to most effectively influence what is accepted as knowledge and delimiting the “conditions of possibility” for alternative interpretations of social reality. Academic disciplines, such as science, economics, sociology and psychology, are certainly discourses in this sense, and their established place within the powerful institutions which are universities reflects their unique role in shaping the way we understand our society and in driving and directing social change.

For centuries universities have identified themselves as the prime centers of knowledge production—academic research, driven by the curiosity of intellectuals and conducted in an environment free from the corrupting influence of political or economic interests, was the best way to discover pure knowledge—or “truth.” This essentially modernist or Cartesian approach views knowledge as objective and unchanging, waiting to be discovered by disinterested scientific method. Application is positioned as a secondary process—“technology” is separated from “science,” and social activism is not a responsibility of academic researchers. Foucault, amongst others, challenges this

position by pointing out that knowledge structures are social structures which have social effects—all knowledge production and truth claiming practices are forms of social activism in that they reproduce or challenge power/knowledge relations. Paulo Friere (1970) advanced an even greater challenge to institutionalized knowledge and education, which views community-based-knowledge generation, critical pedagogy and social action as elements of an integrated whole. So while sociologists and educationists in university faculties have taught their students about Foucault and Friere for a generation, this way of thinking has had little impact on the embedded institutional practices of universities or the disciplines which comprise them. Participatory research with explicit social objectives is viewed with suspicion by the academic establishment, as explained by Jordan:

Its commitment to linking social justice with research is yet another reason why mainstream social science has relegated Participatory Action Research to the fringes of legitimate social research (Jordan 2003, 186).

Jordan actually sees the marginal position of participatory action research as a good thing—but more of that later.

Probably the most influential figure in shifting dominant perceptions of universities' role in knowledge production and transfer in recent times has been Ernest Boyer (1990). Many, if not most, institutions now pay some attention to Boyer's explicit recasting of legitimate scholarship to include teaching and engagement, and also to emphasize the implicit interconnection between these two and the scholarships of discovery and application. This has opened the door to a wider range of approaches to knowledge production being supported and rewarded within the academy, but this is far from a complete project. It is proceeding in a context increasingly dominated by neo-liberal ideology where knowledge is commodified, measured and packaged in ways which make sharing research processes and outcomes with the community far more difficult.

Some elements of the pure knowledge approach have long since been discredited and are well on the way to being abandoned and with them go some traditional disciplinary and other boundaries. This process is characterized by some as the emergence of a new mode of knowledge production known as "Mode 2" (Gibbons 1994) where researchers bring different disciplinary backgrounds and skills to bear "on a real world problem in the context of its application, necessitating much closer links between the researchers and the users of research" (Marsh 2006, 60). Ironically, some argue persuasively that what is now called "Mode 2" actually preceded "Mode 1" which itself does not describe an actual set of practices so much as a

construct built upon that base in order to justify autonomy for science especially in an era when it was still a fragile institution and needed all the help it could get (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff 2000).

This position notwithstanding, it is true to say that the articulation of Mode 2 represents a drive to involve universities more closely in industrial innovation systems, to dispose of the false dichotomy between science and technology, and to expose students to problem-based and experiential learning opportunities. Etzkowitz and Leysdesdorff contend that it is the educational mission of universities which ensures their position at the core of the knowledge sector, that students “represent a dynamic flow-through of human capital in academic research groups, as opposed to more static industrial laboratories and research institutes” (2000, 116).

Contemporaneously with the Mode 2 knowledge production movement has come the growth of Academic Service Learning. ASL emphasizes the personal learning benefits for students of working for community benefit as opposed to specific vocational or professional skills. However, it is fair to say that while ASL emphasizes community needs over institutional or students’ goals and gives inherent recognition to experiential knowledge and learning, it has primarily been a feature of undergraduate programs, and its ultimate learning outcomes are generally described in terms of the benefits to the community of more experienced, well-rounded graduate professionals. ASL is much less likely to appear as a central element of post-graduate research programs where admission to the academy is at stake.

Holland (2006) has described the growing recognition and importance in universities in the U.S., Australia and the U.K. of Mode 2 approaches to research and predicts that meaningful community engagement will increasingly be seen as a measure of the quality of research output. While acknowledging that institutional barriers remain, particularly in academic promotion and reward structures, leading to lack of senior academic leaders in community engaged research, Holland strongly urges that research users and those affected by the outcomes of research should be involved organically in all stages of research design, implementation and dissemination.

Following Foucault, we seek here to take this debate a stage further by thinking of the academy itself as a discursive structure with its own internal rules and logics which are inherently conservative, and, thus, in some important respects at odds with the project of community development described above. Jordan points out:

[T]raditional forms of social science research ...systematically reproduce power relations that contribute to the domination of subordinate groups....In particular, the hierarchical organization of the social sciences, their procedures for data collection and analysis, and rigid adherence to the separation of researcher and subjects in pursuit of objectivity, are seen to produce forms of knowledge that express the relations of ruling (Jordan 2003, 188).

It is not difficult to find university mission statements, strategic plans and policies claiming a commitment to engaged scholarship. However, the disciplinary expectations, institutional review and assessment processes for research student admission and graduation reflect a far more conservative agenda.

[T]he research community in general does not exhibit familiarity with epistemological perspectives and methodologies that do not fit into traditional quantitative descriptive, inferential, and/or experimental designs; many have either not become aware of, refused to consider, or even attempted to counter diverse epistemological perspectives (Cannella and Lincoln 2004, 302).

In the following examples, we consider our own experiences as research students and supervisor attempting to conduct participatory or emancipatory projects through deeply engaged methodologies while at the same time fulfilling the disciplinary and institutional requirements of a research degree. Research students are very well placed to engage meaningfully with, and to place their skills at the disposal of, progressive community projects. However, as doctoral candidates seeking admission to the academy, research students are subject to the most conservative and bureaucratized forms of the conventional notions of ethics, rigour and quality, and we contend that these forms militate against the sharing of knowledge and power. The case studies below focus on three areas of potential conflict between academic and community development principles:

- originality, collaboration and the co-generation of knowledge;
- intellectual property and ethical practice; and
- organizational culture.

Finally, we consider the admission, institutional review, assessment and examination processes for doctoral candidates as credentialing processes for the profession of knowledge production and ask how these processes might be transformed to reflect a critical appreciation of the power-knowledge relation, which avoids exploitation of either the research students or the communities with whom they seek to work.

Originality, Collaboration and the Co-Generation of Knowledge

The objective of collaborative research, as Nyden (2006) explains, is to integrate both university knowledge and community knowledge in the “research enterprise.” Incorporating multiple methods in single research designs is nothing new in academic research, but collaborative forms of PAR (participatory action research) can be seen as a step beyond “triangulation” of methods, which highlights the lived experience and the situated interpretation of reality by research participants. While university-based knowledge, with its many disciplinary traditions, is established as a valuable resource in understanding and interpreting the world, the same recognition of community-based knowledge has been left wanting. However, researchers and policy makers ignore these alternative knowledge systems at their own detriment, as Nyden (2006, 14) maintains:

Community-based knowledge brings with it a detailed awareness of everyday lived experience that comes from community-based organizations, neighborhood councils, and organizations serving local communities. Community-based knowledge represents a unique way of being aware and

understanding the heart of problems, even though the solutions to those problems may remain elusive.

A small research group consisting of two honors students and three academics was formed in 2006 to take part in a collaborative project alongside a small community-based organization in South West Sydney. The broad aim of the research was to help facilitate the development of a wide-ranging framework of internal accountability for the community organization, incorporating both social and economic analysis into the design. In addition, each student (one from each of the two disciplines) developed individual thesis questions which were, to a large degree, reflective of the wider project. The research project was to be developed and carried out in close collaboration with community members, and participatory action research (PAR) methodology was essential to the project.

While the project itself promised its usual set of challenges, objectives and expectations, the requirement for institutional ethics review became an unforeseen challenge in the early stages, where it soon developed into a major hindrance to effective community research. From the outset, a gulf became apparent between what the collaborative research team required and expected from the project and that which the internal review structures within the university considered to be acceptable. In keeping with the philosophical underpinnings of PAR, the project was to be a reflective and iterative—in essence an emerging process. While the scope was decided prior to the field work phase, the exact methods and “questions” would become clearer and more detailed as the research unfolded. To do otherwise would not only discount a major practical benefit of using PAR in the “messy” community setting but also would be excluding the right of the research participants (community co-enquirers) from actively steering the project to suit the specific needs of the community.

The demand for assurances of originality, disciplinary specificity, and “protection” of research participants reveal a continuing tension between the university and community expectations and the different meanings attached to particular practices by each. Despite the university asserting a strong commitment toward academic engagement with the community, the research found that internal ethics processes were structured in a way which effectively excluded community partners from collaborating in the formative stages of the research. Upon receiving a request for ethical clearance, the internal review board replied with a list of additional requirements. The research team was expected to present a detailed written proposal outlining an original piece of research which anticipates all possible questions, methods and extent of participant involvement while insuring them “protection” and “anonymity.” Interestingly, there was no mention from the review board of ensuring the rights of the “participant” to influence or direct the unfolding process and how those in the community wished to be represented through the research (Lincoln and Canella 2004). As experienced during the research process, such expectations work counter to the university engagement policy by forcing student researchers to develop specifics of “our” projects with little or no consultation let alone guidance from the supposed community partners. While the review board’s expectations may be understandable given the nature of honors

level research and the necessity for strict assessment criteria, the impact on the research project was profound as the reality of working in community partnerships come in conflict with the individual academic requirements placed on students. Members of the community organization, who became both researchers and researched, could only be constructed in the ethics process as “research subjects” from whom the students sought informed consent.

The process of finally gaining ethics approval was a time-consuming process and one that resulted in significant misgivings and eventual divisions within the research group. Surprisingly, the impact of this process was that community partners became less involved in the research as time wore on, not more so. The demands of working in the community setting, coupled with a lack of understanding for internal university processes, meant that community partners were often unavailable for discussion in the numerous revisions and resubmissions of the research design. After a “catch-up” discussion with one community partner, it was clear that he was particularly puzzled at the bureaucratic nature of the process which was, in effect, stifling the university’s own research. By the time the research was underway, a number of members of the research team had left (due to a range of reasons), and the research was to be severely restricted in its overall scope due to time and personnel constraints on remaining members.

Wider Implications

The research reveals an inconsistency within the university structure which is not isolated to the specific context outlined above—it is characteristic of community-based research. Methods, analytical frameworks and even research aims are not fixed but emergent; they develop and change in response to changing social and political conditions and to the evolving knowledge and interpretations of collaborators and participants. Yet university requirements on students usually include submission of relatively detailed research designs often to the level of sample questionnaires, observation schedules, etc. Students are rightly nervous about submitting tentative or provisional proposals to ethics committees or confirmation of candidature panels.

The pragmatic reality of community research becomes easily lost among the constraining demands placed on student researchers through what is effectively a conservative, process-driven university structure. Little credence is given to opening this process up to the complex realities facing research teams and the “research subjects” who often invest considerable time and resources into such collaborative research projects. By focusing on the potential for student researchers to unethically infringe the rights of participants as vulnerable research subjects (and the associated risk to the institution of complaints or even litigation), the ethics review process appears to be blind to the more fundamental ethical questions concerning ownership and control of the emerging research process and the knowledge it generates. As the case study exemplifies, ethical consideration of what comprises acceptable practices of knowledge production and power relations between research students and community co-researchers needs to move beyond traditional positivist assumptions. Incorporating the community partners’ involvement in the review process, perhaps through holding

positions in the internal review panel as well as representing themselves as “co-enquirers” in the review process, would be a start.

Ethical Practice and Intellectual Property: “Giving” and “Taking” Voice

While the idea of empowering research engagement with communities is exciting, one must ask at times, for whom is it empowering? Often the notion of “giving voice” to marginalized groups in the arena of academic literature is reified as a legitimating and positive experience for those involved. However, “giving voice” is a methodological instrument, rather than an ethical practice because the only voice that receives the benefit of “ownership” of the research findings is the researcher. Ethically implementing collaborative and participatory methods in the field can become tainted when operating within the bureaucratic structures of the academy.

Researching with Indigenous (Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) peoples is an example of how ethical procedures designed to ‘protect’ participants may actually perpetuate neo-colonial exploitation of community researchers involved in collaborative projects. In the case of undertaking research with Indigenous peoples, researchers must demonstrate consultation prior to submitting an ethics proposal. This was done over several months, and then, once institutional approval was gained the student worked in partnership with community members to design a research project to engage young Aboriginal people in the community to inform the design of future community development activities. The student and collaborators would meet as a group and draw mind-maps of their project to picture all that would happen during the research process—it was a group design, aiming to implement a community development initiative, a community report, and opportunities for the community workers to develop their research skills. The collection of “data” was to be facilitated by recording workshops for the youth, and the Aboriginal community workers were also going to interview workshop participants and contribute to the analysis of the data.

After a year of working with the community group collaboratively designing the research project they were ready to commence the workshops. At this point the university required that the student obtain written informed consent of both the young workshop participants and their parent or guardian. With reticence she brought a draft of the consent form to the collaboration to ask for feedback. The consent form contained the usual features of free and informed consent, protection of privacy and confidentiality, secure storage of the data on-campus (with a reference to destroying the data after five years), and a note which stated that the research had been approved by the university ethics committee and which gave contact details if there was reason for complaint about the ethical conduct. The group told her, “It’s very formal...can you change the way it’s written?” Unfortunately, she was unable to do this due to the legal and risk management requirements of the university. As Bhattacharya (2007, 1095) suggests, “If understanding of the consent form and its meaning is contingent and permanently deferred, then how does the relationship between the researcher and the researched inform de/colonizing methodologies?” The co-inquirers initial response

demonstrated that despite the claims of the methodology to “empower” participants, the institution was claiming ownership and control of the data.

Bringing the consent form to the group was a reminder that the student was viewed as the researcher and the group of community co-inquirers were “the researched.” By “giving voice” to the research participants, she was ‘taking their voice’ as well. While she had discussed community ownership of the findings from the workshop, transparency and recognition of contribution, and on-going negotiation about the project, the student was forced to present a contract to the community which was to privilege administrative requirements over the ethical accountability to her co-inquirers. Some action researchers have reconciled this by making a distinction between the exercise of collaborative activity and the approval from an institutional review board to write about such activity in a research context (Brydon-Miller and Greenwood 2006, 121). This issue remains complex and unreconciled in the context of undertaking research with colonized peoples. Researchers have taken from and exploited Indigenous Australian communities since the beginning of colonization (Smith 1999). While the Australian system of ethical regulation has additional guidelines for research involving Indigenous communities (NHMRC 2003), the reality is an ethics system of risk management mediated by administrative accountability.

The ethical demands of a community are in contrast to university concerns. Here the focus is on ethical conduct as praxis rather than documentary evidence and fair distribution of intellectual property. These concerns may include on-going negotiation and consultation with the people who are involved in the study, involvement of community members in all stages of the research (design, implementation, analysis and evaluation), research results which are useful to the community involved in the research, appropriate attribution of those involved in the research, collaborative ownership of research results, access and control of data, and the sharing of the benefits of the research.

Doctoral candidates and other research students committed to community development and engagement principles are faced with the challenge of fully recognizing the extensive contribution that collaborators make to their thesis, which by definition is required to be an original product of the researcher’s effort and a demonstration of their disciplinary knowledge and research expertise alone. It is also the case that the research student stands to benefit significantly from completing the project, publishing outcomes and being awarded a higher degree which may admit them to an academic career. Yet rarely, if ever, is official consideration given to the ethics of reciprocal benefits for community participants in research.

Organization Culture

Noting the current shifts towards “methodological conservatism” observed by Lincoln and Cannella, this paper suggests that positivist criticisms of “participatory” research methodologies are being played out through various mechanisms within the university. A third project undertaken by one of the present authors while working as an “insider” in

the partner organization raised questions about the acceptance of this form of engaged methodology for students managing dual roles in differing organizational cultures.

The research was a partnership project between the University of Western Sydney and a local government authority (hereinafter, the Council) and clearly fit with the university's "engagement" policy. The research was centered on the redevelopment of a public housing estate, of which the Council was a key stakeholder and specifically focused on "tenant participation" in the redevelopment process. The research partners negotiated the research outputs to be a report for Council outlining the research findings and an honors thesis for the research student for submission. Additionally, the student, a current employee of the Council, would remain an employee and would continue to work closely with tenants on the Council's "tenant participation" project.

This element was integral to the conception and realization of the research project as much of the trust building, with tenants and with the research partners, had already been developed. Importantly, the research questions were formulated by the researcher after working closely with tenants on the Council's "tenant participation" project over the preceding year. Additionally, it is worth noting that the changing role of the researcher from employee to employee/researcher, created additional ethical issues and employment tensions. This was especially true when reporting research data and findings and explaining the often restrictive university requirements on the research process.

The original proposal for the project emerged organically as the Council had engaged the university on similar research projects, the researcher had an established relationship with the stakeholders (including tenants), and the University was committed to

[C]ommunity engagement...in order to exchange knowledge, harness community expertise and energy for mutual benefit and contribute to the region's development, prosperity and social capital .

The apparent commitment of the stakeholders to the research presented the illusion that the research process would proceed fairly effortlessly. Indeed, the research simply required university ethics approval to proceed and needed to be completed in the timeframe outlined by honors degree requirements.

Again the bureaucratic structures of the institution halted the research process to question the lack of separation between the researcher and the researched. In this project, the researcher/researched dichotomy was challenged as the previous experiences of the student himself became part of the research focus. Prior to enrolling in the honors (research) program, the student had completed two ASL units which took the form of research projects for Council where no formal ethics approval was completed. The student was in a unique position, having worked closely with tenants over the preceding year on the tenant involvement project, to analyze and critically reflect upon data and observations made in the course of his work prior to seeking institutional approval.

Undoubtedly, the collaborative nature of the research and “insider” status of the researcher also provided access to data not readily available through traditional (positivist) research methods. As DeTardo-Bora (2004, 242) contends, in empirical research conducted under the traditional paradigm of positivism, rigor is marked by control, control over the environment, the participants, and the research process. Additionally, rigor is demonstrated by the relationship between researcher and participant, as one that is temporary, detached, uninvolved, and objective.

Although a significant data collection process had commenced even before the research project was conceived—through the employment experiences of the researcher—the University ethics process impeded further formal data collection. The University raised questions about using data collected prior to the formal commencement of research without the “informed consent” of research subjects (Williamson and Prosser 2002). This research project was a collaborative reflection on the tenant involvement project, including those elements designed and implemented by the student, so that participants were being asked to reflect upon, in part, the performance of the student in the project (Chiu 2006, 186-187).

The research project quickly stalled and was faced with the prospect of a long resolution process threatening the student’s completion of the degree within the university’s specified timeframe. Meanwhile, the other partners in the research, governed by diverse and differing timeframes, expectations and funding mechanisms, remained perplexed.

In order to better facilitate “participatory” research methods in Honors, Master’s and Ph.D. research projects, it may be necessary to review the cultural and temporal expectations attached to these projects. Increased flexibility may better reflect the various timeframes experienced by industry and community partners.

Universities and Disciplines as Knowledge Gatekeepers

Universities are in the business of creating experts and, increasingly, in the neo-liberal twenty-first century of selling expertise, while community development is about recognizing and distributing new forms and distribution of expertise which challenge social disadvantage and injustice. These are not necessarily contradictory agendas and the potential for productive partnerships is immense and exciting. Tenured members of the professoriate may be in a good position to push the boundaries of knowledge production and transfer. However, doctoral candidates attempting to put engagement with disadvantaged or disenfranchised communities at the center of their work, and to take seriously the aims and methods of progressive community development, confront a series of challenges and dilemmas.

These challenges relate to fundamental questions about

- the nature of knowledge: objective and value free or contextual, political;

- the role of the researcher: independent expert or committed collaborator; and
- the ownership and control of outputs.

While these questions might be pondered theoretically, and rhetorical commitments made by university committees, for research students they play out in very practical ways through university and discipline gatekeeping and credentialing processes, in particular Confirmation of Candidature panels, University Ethics Committees and Thesis Examination processes.

As large bureaucratic institutions, universities seek to maintain standards and manage risk in typically bureaucratic ways. They do this through institutional review and assessment bodies made up of people who have already gained admission to the academy under the existing power-knowledge regime. Academic disciplines use peer review processes to regulate knowledge validation within their fields and to define the boundaries of those fields. With respect to publications, the social sciences have made some progress toward development of publication forums which respect and understand interpretive and collaborative methods, but academic publishing and writing styles remain inaccessible to community partners and alternative publishing options are rarely recognized in university performance measures.

Thesis examination processes are generally more conservative than academic journals when it comes to issues of collaboration, rigour, and responsibility for outcomes. In the increasingly competitive Australian university sector, institutions are calling more and more on measures and indicators of “quality” to advance their reputations and market position. This often means not just peer reviewed but international peer reviewed, which often diminishes local relevance. Where research degree candidates are concerned, this generally means more specific requirements for confirmation of candidature and more explicit guidelines for thesis examiners in relation to locating research questions within the discipline, rigorous research design and application of more standardized ethics procedures and intellectual property arrangements. In themselves these might seem like positive developments, but, in the absence of a far more complex understanding of participatory research principles, they will tend to discourage research students from taking the risky option of community-based collaborative projects.

Contemporary Australian peer and institutional review processes, funding arrangements and expectations tend to reinforce a standardized model of research (or at least to make it easier); promote a separation between researchers and researched and emphasize individualized responsibility and reward for outcomes. Universities that are serious about engaged research and a meaningful role in community development need to consider whether their institutional practices truly allow for and encourage collaborative work between students and people outside the academic community, deliberately emergent research design, and joint production and ownership of outcomes. Some disciplines have re-opened questions of what constitutes rigor and how it might be assessed in the case of participatory action research—and this now

needs to be reflected in credentialing processes for students. Examples of the type of approach required might include the inclusion of testimonials from community collaborators as part of the assessment process of jointly-authored research reports, and the inclusion of non-academic members on ethics panels.

Conclusion

To summarize, firstly we contend that the apparently progressive discourse of Mode 2 knowledge production allows the continuation of an essentialist and unreflexive approach to knowledge itself—research users, industry partners, etc. are invited to join university research teams, but the scientific method and knowledge validation processes remain unchallenged. As a corollary of this, we fear that the progressive discourses of engagement and of participatory action research may even be co-opted into institutional projects of marketing and fundraising with little real community development benefit.

Secondly, while Holland and others have identified continuing institutional barriers to genuine engagement in areas such as recruitment, promotion, institutional review and grant determination processes, they have omitted the area of institutional life which has the greatest potential to make a long-term difference and yet remains most unaffected by contemporary debate and most strongly in the hands of traditional disciplines—that is admission to the academy through doctoral research.

In confronting issues facing engaged academics in the U.S., Canella and Lincoln (2004) provide a strong case for the creation of a set of standards which could guide effective community research.

They challenge us to question how we can construct collaboration in socially just ways which do not impose predetermined notions of emancipation but allow participants to choose how they are represented (Canella and Lincoln 2004, 305).

Considerations such as these could contribute to less bureaucratic review processes which understand and cater to the complex reality that engaged researchers and communities face in collaborative enterprises. Community-based research cannot mean rescuing people with the moral superiority of traditional “objective” science or using engagement as a marketing tool. We should take seriously Jordan’s warnings that moving participatory action research from a marginal to a mainstream discourse in universities may see its critical nature compromised as

the prevalent discourses of participation that define contemporary approaches to...participatory research are being infiltrated and appropriated by neo-liberalism (Jordan 2003, 192).

To avoid the university engagement agenda being colonized by a commodification one, a strong movement in the other direction is required. We need to actively reconstruct the ways in which knowledge is produced, validated and shared between university

and community and in particular to revisit the process by which new members are inducted into academe.

Reconceptualizations and constructions of a critical public social science must, therefore, always engage in critique of the unnamed Western, imperialist intellectual scientific project and material conditions in which we are all now embedded (Cannella and Lincoln 2004, 304).

Research students are the next generation of professors. They should be encouraged and allowed to develop genuinely collaborative action research frameworks and to build their experience of this way of working into the academic mainstream. The challenge is for institutions to make this possible.

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