BOOK REVIEW

Bridging Knowledge Cultures – Rebalancing Power in the Co-construction of Knowledge, Lepore, W, Hall, BL, and Tandon, R (Eds) (Brill, 2023)

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Bridging Knowledge Cultures is a scholarly treatment of some of the most under-studied and challenging issues facing researchers and community partners involved in community-university research partnerships (CURP is an acronym frequently featured in this edited collection).

The structures that evaluate what counts as new and fundable knowledge have evolved over a relatively long timeline, primarily driven by traditional forms of explorative, descriptive and critical analysis research, and the interests of universities, research institutions, funders, and governments. Community-university research partnerships do not always fit the established evaluation and funding structures as comfortably as more established models of research. Community based participatory research has seen positive evolution over the past two decades throughout much of the global academy, since the principles of mutual respect and mutual benefit gained traction. The contemporary move beyond the mutually respectful and mutually beneficial objectives in interactions and outcomes, towards mutual acknowledgement of ownership and authorship of knowledge, and the co-creation of new knowledge, has put community-university research partnerships into a new orbit of potential sustainability and success, but comes with additional challenges, not helped by the mismatch in established processes and norms of research and funding institutions. This book is about seeking solutions to the knowledge power inequalities that persist in the community-university research space.

In their introduction, the collection editors work from a recognition that knowledge is created everywhere by individuals and social structures, and an acknowledgement that different contexts give rise to different knowledge cultures. They provide a clear understanding of what is meant by knowledge culture, and they set about establishing a framework for subsequent chapters, which present case studies from a diversity of cultures and geographic locations.

The book goes on to argue that almost all of the key activities conducted in CURP end up being rooted in power relations of some kind, with various constituents bringing different positions of power and understanding to the working relationship. These power differentials influence not only behaviour but also create hierarchies of knowledge based upon entrenched norms and assumptions of participants. Ensuring that mutual respect and benefit pervades the knowledge domain poses one of the biggest challenges in CURP.

In an effort to understand how best to address the challenge of power imbalances, actual or perceived, between collaborating CURP partners, two of the editors of this volume embarked on an ambitious project with a global reach, carrying the same title as this book – *Bridging Knowledge Cultures (BKC)*. The research phase of the BKC project spanned the period 2020 to 2022. It drew in researchers and community partners from diverse disciplinary fields, diverse geographic locations, and diverse knowledge cultures, which provided the case studies contained in the book, and formed the basis for the data which the book assimilates into its findings. The project sought to analyse the interactions between detached, sometimes conflicting, knowledge cultures in the CURP space, and how the participant projects sought to overcome power inequalities and evolve their working processes to better accommodate them. The BKC project was built upon the existing Knowledge for Change (K4C) Global Consortium, of which community-university research partnerships are a central component and divided the geographic reach of the project into four regions – Latin America, Africa, Southern Asia, and the Global North (Canada and Europe in this case).

The underpinning value of this book is its unique analysis of knowledge cultures in the context of CURP, and its synthesis of best practices and models. Part 1 of the book provides a scholarly context for the case studies that follow, positioning the questions addressed by the BKC project against both a historical and present-day evolving philosophy of knowledge background. The chapter on a theoretical framework to bridge knowledge cultures develops an analytical basis to explain the intricacies of power dynamics and points of tension that commonly emerge in CURP interactions, and melds an extensive literature review with the range of knowledge management practices drawn from the diverse social and cultural contexts of the participating project partners.

Part 1 also includes a chapter on understanding community knowledge cultures, and the ways in which knowledge is produced, curated and spread in communities. In addition to providing an understanding of how knowledge is perceived and understood in a range of community settings, this section provides a road map for academic researchers seeking to classify, engage with, respect and benefit from expertise that resides in collaborating partners, in the form of a set of characteristics that exemplify community knowledge.

Part 2 forms the bulk of the book, and comprises a set of ten chapters, each describing a distinct case study. These chapters describe the particular CURP relationship, the overt project content, and provide an analysis of the power relations and knowledge cultures at play, offering insights and lessons learned. The case studies cover examples

from remarkably diverse cultures, religions, geographic locations, and socio-economic contexts, spanning Indonesia, Malaysia, India (2 studies), Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa (2 studies), Colombia, and Canada.

The knowledge domains of the various case studies are equally diverse – fishing expertise, heritage, health care, waste management, Indigenous knowledge systems, water practices and technologies, health education, early childhood development, and social change dynamics for historically marginalized people.

The stories contained in each chapter are interesting in themselves, representing a range of experiences, and a rich miscellany of knowledge representation systems. Commonalities and methodologies in the varied participant experiences are what the book particularly seeks to identify. The distinctive knowledge cultures of the academic and community participants in each case provide a vivid and wide-ranging data set for the project as a whole to draw from, compiling a set of transferrable best practices, and synthesizing an understanding of the bridging process itself.

The final section of the book, Part 3, is an analysis of the knowledge gleaned from the *Bridging Knowledge Cultures* project. This is a section of the book that practitioners of engaged research will identify with in numbers, as some of the challenges exposed are those which represent the divergence of institutional and national processes and norms with the needs of community based participatory research.

A chapter entitled *The Art of Bridging*, draws together and contextualises common and transferrable learning from the case studies of the previous chapters, and looks at possible bridging techniques for the mismatches that are evident between the knowledge cultures of university and community. The insights contained in *The Art of Bridging* provide tools for the reader to ensure that the primary principles in the management of multiple knowledge cultures are not overlooked. Those academic researchers who have influence on institutional, statutory funding, and policy committees within their disciplines, which are empowered to evolve processes and criteria for funding, acknowledgement, and other forms of support, will find this set of insights particularly valuable in orientating the established formal research economy towards better acknowledgment and support of work in the CURP domain. Not all of these keys to the *art of bridging* are quantifiable, and some are relatively infrequently used given their value, such as the role of boundary-spanners and interlocutors. All are essential.

The book acknowledges that the reader is likely to be unsurprised by the key findings; the goal is to provide the case evidence for how crucial these factors are and provide possibilities for bridging the gaps in knowledge cultures within the context of CURP.

The book's concluding thoughts emphasise the need for the inclusion of community voices in the conversations around biased knowledge culture relationships, and approaches to bridging them. The final message of the book is on *missing glues and hopeful futures*, acknowledging that we have seen some positive shifts in recent years, but that some important gaps remain unbridged.

Bridging Knowledge Cultures is a good read, a great reference for university researchers and community partners involved in engaged research projects, and an essential volume for those struggling with the evolution of their own institutional processes to make them more supportive of the social and epistemic justice obligations of CURP.

In the true spirit of epistemic justice, this book is an open access title, the digital version of which is distributed freely under a creative commons license.

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