

Exchanges

In the *Exchanges*, we present conversations with scholars and practitioners of community engagement, responses to previously published material, and other reflections on various aspects of community-engaged scholarship meant to provoke further dialogue and discussion. We invite our readers to offer in this section their own thoughts and ideas on the meanings and understandings of engaged scholarship, as practiced in local or faraway communities, diverse cultural settings, and various disciplinary contexts. We especially welcome community-based scholars' views and opinions on their collaboration with university-based partners in particular and on engaged scholarship in general.

Below, **Natalia Khanenko-Friesen** talks to **Randy Stoecker** about his work and his views on engaged scholarship in Canada. Dr. Stoecker is a Professor of Community and Environmental Sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a newest member of the Journal's Editorial Board.

Conversation with Randy Stoecker, University of Wisconsin-Madison

At the recent annual conference of the Engaged Scholarship Consortium which was held for the first time in Canada, in Edmonton in October 2014, I took part in the work of many sessions, basking in the lively atmosphere of the conference, meeting new colleagues, and familiarizing myself with new and impressive scholarship of engagement pursued in North America and the United States specifically. Engaged Scholarship Consortium is based in the United States and most of the presenters at the conference were from the US as well. One session was particularly memorable. In it, I had the privilege of listening to Dr. Randy Stoecker, University of Wisconsin-Madison, who presented "Learning, Service, Community, and Change: Challenging the Conventions of University-Community Partnership." This is what I took away from the presentation.

Focusing on core concepts of higher education community-engagement learning, service,



*Professor Randy Stoecker records ideas as a group of students and representatives from Madison-area nonprofits brainstorm topics that should be investigated in a new community-based research study (2006).
(Photo: Michael Forster Rothbart)*

community and change, Dr. Stoecker offered his critique of the assumed meanings of these four concepts in the institutional community engagement, pointing out that all four are highly problematic. He challenged and unpacked these concepts, warning that their uncritical use often misleads and limits the scope, focus, and direction of community-engaged work. Institutional community engagement, as it was initially conceptualized, Stoecker pointed out, indeed rests on the above concepts as if on four pillars, listing them in some sort of order of priority. *Learning* is a primary and focal point in all undertakings in community-engaged scholarship in the university setting. Though it can be creative and experiential, it is first and above all student focused. *Service*, if taking the term's own meaning into consideration, usually implies charity-like work and hours of serving the needs of an off-campus group that the students are brought into. The notion of *community* is especially problematic and often bears no specific meaning as it is applied to such a variety of contexts. How often do we deal with true face-to-face interdependent communities that occupy shared and continued space and time? The concept of *change* is not a straightforward notion either. What does "change" presuppose, asked Stoecker, in what contexts and settings was it to take place as a result of engaged research, teaching and learning?

Noting that early conceptualizations of engaged scholarship frequently ignored power imbalance in the relationships between the university and the communities that were to benefit from service, Stoecker discussed more recent and more innovative approaches to community engagement, such as community-based research and critical service learning. While it is an improvement on earlier conceptualizations of engagement, these recent innovations are only partial fixes and not solutions to many existing misgivings and assumptions about engaged scholarly work. That engaged scholarly work in research, teaching, and learning needs to be mutually beneficial and based on reciprocity is now an accepted understanding of community engagement. Yet, how can one define a mutual benefit between a university (usually a multimillion dollar institution) and a small marginalized community? Also recently, a top-down approach to the community-engaged scholarship projects, administration and reporting that developed on many American campuses led to the development of various "tools" designed to "measure" engagement and to evaluate its "outputs."

In light of these developments, Stoecker proposes a new approach to community-engaged work on the university campuses which he referred to as "liberating community engagement." He first suggests that we have to reverse the order in which the four pillars of community-engaged scholarship are usually imagined in various programmatic and strategic documents and measurement tools, emphasizing the primary focus on change. Change, especially within the community but also within the university stakeholders groups, is generated and empowered by knowledge and thorough understanding of the challenges that are addressed in community-engaged projects, most rooted in the systemic nature of disparity and injustice in the social world. To achieve *change* is to have its agents empowered and equipped with knowledge as a primary tool of action. The rest of academic or institutional priorities should follow. Thus, the second priority, *community* is not a starting point in the liberating community-engagement, but rather a final destination. The true sense of community will emerge in the

course of collaboration and will be a result of such empowerment. The third priority, *service* should be based on ‘allyship’ or equal partnership and participatory action research and not on imbalanced relations and charity. All these will lead towards and result in the meaningful and transformative experience of *learning*. Learning is seen here not only as another priority or a goal but as a process and new state of mind. It is through learning and community involvement, informed by ‘allyship’-based community engagement that the new tools for the communities to address and resolve the challenges they face will be created. Such community involvement and transformative experience are ultimately what community-engaged scholars should be pursuing in their work.

Dr. Stoecker discusses his approach to community-engaged scholarship in his book that he is currently working on, titled *Liberating Service Learning (and the Rest of Higher Education Civic Engagement Too)*. We are looking forward to seeing this work published.

At the conference, we agreed with Dr. Stoecker to discuss his views on the state of the engaged scholarship in Canada in the format of a brief conversation to be presented in our inaugural issue here. Dr. Stoecker kindly agreed. In Canada, Stoecker is well known as a leading specialist in community-engagement and often participates in various seminars and symposia north of the Canada-US border. The University of Saskatchewan will be also hosting Dr. Stoecker with his keynote address at the Engaged Scholar Day on April 30, 2015. Here are the excerpts from our conversation:

Natalia: What in the first place motivated you to write the book you are currently working on? What does your book aim to accomplish?

Randy: Why am I writing it? It’s partly because I feel like I am living through the final novels in the Harry Potter series when Voldemort has risen to power. A terrifying right-wing government rose to power in Wisconsin in 2011, even worse than the Harris government in Ontario. And here we have all this rhetoric about “The Wisconsin Idea” that somehow the university can educate and lift up every person in the state, and the majority of those people elect and re-elect the Walker government to destroy everything that is good about the state, including higher education itself. If we are so good at doing outreach through all this higher education community engagement, why are people making such self-destructive decisions? So the book is trying to figure out where engaged scholarship has gone wrong. And in writing it I believe I have uncovered assumptions and theories that have led our higher education community engagement down its own self-destructive path.

Natalia: Currently, working through the essays that were submitted for the inaugural issue of the *Engaged Scholar Journal*, corresponding with peer reviewers and various CES communities of scholars, and thinking through future activities at the Journal, a few things struck me when it comes to the nature of community-engaged scholarship in Canada. First, the Canadian field of CES is, expectedly, very diverse and this creates its opportunities as well as perhaps challenges.

Randy: Compared to the U.S. context, I believe the Canadians have some important signs of hope. First, you haven't privileged the higher education side of the "partnership" to the extent to which the U.S. has. You at least had the CURA program, which allowed community-side organizations to be lead applicants. The U.S. had nothing like that. Of course, the danger now is that the old CURA has been folded into SSHRC, allowing the possibility for academics to take over. You also have the Tri-Council statement on research with First Peoples, which is basically community-based research ethics. All you need to do now is apply that to all research. We have nothing even comparable in the U.S., though some of our First Peoples nations are drafting their own policies.

Natalia: Secondly, there is a prominent axle in much of Canadian CES work — Indigenous/ Aboriginal one. This dimension in Canada's CES is quite pronounced and because of it, one of our next issues is devoted to engaged scholarship in the context of Indigenous research, teaching and learning.

Randy: Yes, it is quite pronounced. But it appears to be more about preventing the bad colonizing research practices than making visible good, alternative research practices. I am hoping to hear more stories that can show the way to knowledge mobilization that transform Euro-dominated culture.

Natalia: Thirdly, while there is no established, strictly speaking, Canadian framework for CES, Canadian scholars are well aware of CES scholarship outside of Canada and of the American model of CES. It is certainly a sign of some healthy cross-pollination of ideas between the neighbouring countries. At the same time, in the submissions that were sent in for peer review and editorial review, not much reflection on scholarship outside of North America was offered. In this regard, I wonder to what degree, by embracing the best practices of American scholarship, Canadian scholars might find themselves promoting not just best examples of CES elsewhere but the American model of CES?

Randy: Yea, the worst thing you can do is copy anything from south of the border. But, sadly, I am seeing more and more of that. I did a workshop at a major Canadian university a few years ago and I felt like I was still in the U.S. The faculty were mostly interested in knowing how to use community engagement to educate their students rather than to create a better society. On the other hand, you have some of the most progressive work happening. I am aware of the work at the University of Victoria developed under the leadership of Budd Hall, for example. And I am most impressed with the work of the Trent Community Research Centre in Peterborough, Ontario, and the U-Links Centre for Community-Based Research in Minden, Ontario. These two organizations are "science shops" in the best European tradition and perhaps even have a leg up on the European model because both of these organizations are independent non-profits that can safeguard

community interests in community-university partnership research. They are truly global leaders.

Natalia: 2. Reflecting on institutional achievements and accomplishments and at times occasional limitations of the American framework of CES, as you encountered those in your career as CES scholar, what might you wish for the Canadian scholars who may be exploring, in their minds and conversations, the feasibility of creating its own national framework? Should Canada have a national conceptual framework (like Carnegie) for pursuing its CES initiatives across the nation and beyond? Or should it model itself after some other national frameworks elsewhere?

Randy: The Carnegie classification is a hollow shell. Universities fill out a bunch of forms with superficial information devoid of any evidence of real impact in order to get the shiny medal. But there is little of real substance behind it. If you want to have a national recognition framework, build it around actual impacts, not around how many bodies are engaged in how many hours of system-maintaining charity activities.

Natalia: Unlike the American field of CES, with so many great scholarly publishing venues in existence, in Canada we only now turned to the production of the first national journal on CES. What might you wish for our new journal?

Randy: I wish your journal to be more than just a journal. So much higher education community engagement is about academic self-congratulatory rhetoric. The writing in the mainstream journals is almost devoid of any deep reflection or self-critical analysis. Someone, somewhere, needs to be brave enough to look carefully not at all the stuff we are doing, but at how little is actually being accomplished. I hope your journal can provide a space where people feel safe to engage in the deep critical reflection—just like we expect from our students—that can move the practice of CES from just another academic practice to something that helps change the world.

About the Contributors

Randy Stoecker is a Professor of Community and Environmental Sociology at the University of Wisconsin, with a joint appointment at the University of Wisconsin Extension Center for Community and Economic Development. He is the moderator/editor of COMM-ORG: The On-Line Conference on Community Organizing and Development (<http://comm-org.wisc.edu>). His areas of expertise include community organizing and development, participatory action research/evaluation, and community information technology. He has been involved in a wide variety of community-based participatory research projects and participatory evaluations

with community development corporations, community organizing groups, and community information technology programs across North America and Australia. He also helped build and evaluate university-community collaborations through the Corella and Bertram F. Bonner Foundation's Learn and Serve America Community Research Project. Randy trains, speaks, and writes extensively on community organizing and development, community-based participatory research, service learning, and community information technology. He is author of *Defending Community* (1994) co-author of *Community-Based Research and Higher Education* (2003), and co-editor of *The Unheard Voices: Community Organizations and Service Learning* (2009).

Natalia Khanenko-Friesen is an Inaugural Editor of the *Engaged Scholar Journal*, a cultural anthropologist and an oral historian with extensive experience in community outreach and community-engaged scholarship. Dr. Khanenko-Friesen is an Associate Professor at St. Thomas More College and the Head of the Department of Religion and Culture. Interested in ethnicity and diasporas, post-socialist transition and labour migration, she initiated and worked on a variety of community-based projects in Western Canada, Ukraine, Italy, and Portugal. A former director of internationally recognized Prairie Centre for the Ukrainian Heritage at the U of Saskatchewan, she currently coordinates the Centre's Oral History Program. She is a founder and coordinator of the University of Saskatchewan Study Abroad Semester in Ukraine. Dr. Khanenko-Friesen has authored and co-authored five books including two monographs and published numerous other essays on various topics of her research. Email: engaged.scholar@usask.ca.