

BOOK REVIEW

BRIDGING KNOWLEDGE CULTURES: REBALANCING POWER IN THE CO-CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

REVIEWED BY:

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Lepore, W., Hall, B. L., & Tandon, R. (Eds.) (2024). *Bridging knowledge cultures: Rebalancing power in the co-construction of knowledge*. Brill. Pages: 314. Price: CDN 237.85 (hardcover); CDN 102.03 (paper).

In *Bridging knowledge cultures: Rebalancing power in the co-construction of knowledge*, Walter Lepore, Budd L. Hall, and Rajesh Tandon present ten case studies centered on community-university research partnerships (CURP) from the global Knowledge for Change (K4C) Consortium as part of the larger Bridging Knowledge Cultures (BKC) project. The K4C consortium, also described as a laboratory, is composed of K4C hubs (each hub has one higher education institution and one civil society organization) situated in America, Africa, Southern Asia, and the Global North (Canada and Europe). The three-year BKC project composed of the K4C consortium aimed to answer this question:

In establishing trusting and respectful CURP, how can diverse knowledge cultures be bridged so that perceived or actual power inequalities between collaborating CURP partners are taken into consideration in a way that makes these connections sustainable, secure over time, and able to contribute to better lives, social justice, climate solutions or healthier communities? (Lepore et al., p.5)

The approaches and methods used in these case studies offer ways for “re-balancing” power dynamics between universities and local surrounding communities of research and com-

munity development. The strategies proposed offer ways to bridge knowledge cultures through balancing institutional power dynamics, validating local community knowledge systems, and considering ethical leadership skills needed to create meaningful relationships with community members operating outside of academia. In doing so, the book shares the ways in which knowledge-protected institutions such as universities can help to acknowledge and defend community knowledge systems.

“BRIDGING” KNOWLEDGE CULTURES

Knowledge cultures, as described by Lepore and Jenni in their co-authored chapter in this book, are operationalized as structures of “formal and informal roles, structures, norms and practices, shared meanings and cultural forms which influence how knowledge is understood, valued, assembled, shared and acted upon in a specific setting” (p. 19). With this understanding, the book discusses the tensions that exist in acknowledging the value of diverse knowledge cultures that exist outside of academia.

The case studies reviewed present a range of knowledge systems within CURP. These include academic and research knowledge, community knowledge, cultural knowledge, and institutional policy knowledge, among other types mentioned in this book. Individuals engaging in CURP are encouraged to question their co-responsibility and mission among other university researchers and affiliated hubs working alongside community knowledge systems. The book expands on ways in which diverse knowledge cultures can be bridged to co-exist to make meaningful impact. As the case studies present, it starts with *challenging* academic knowledge systems, in terms of the ways to engage with local communities in their knowledge exchange, decolonization approaches and practices, acknowledging the legitimacy and the existence of various cultural knowledge systems (e.g., Indigenous Knowledges, African Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Tribal Knowledge Systems in South Asia), and question the ethical “ownership” of knowledge.

A valuable contribution this book makes is the discussion around *validating* knowledge within CURP. As discussed, knowledge in the academic space is validated through the dissemination of research in journals, publications, and conferences, which often incorporates community knowledge (Naily et al., p. 76). Unfortunately, this gives the space to academia to validate community knowledge to the public (p. 76). In demonstrating this point, Naily et al. state that the “power to validate knowledge is unequal, because community knowledge remains unvalidated until it is proven by academia” (p. 79). The control and legitimization of knowledge reminds readers to question the “democratization of knowledge” in terms of the right to create, validate, and disseminate knowledge (Wood et al., p. 184).

BRIDGING COMMON GOALS

As explored, *bridging* knowledge cultures between universities and communities requires a university to evaluate its “readiness” (Yadav et al., p.125) to not only engage with local surrounding communities, but to build a support

system defined by *trust*. A university and a community may share similar goals in building community developments; however, it is important to bridge different knowledge systems together to co-create sustainable solutions with meaningful impact. I appreciated the discussion of knowledge sharing instead of just always focusing on knowledge creation (Wood et al., 189). For example, traditional techniques used by local communities should be acknowledged for their sustainable impact that works for a community, rather than invalidating traditional methods of knowing what works appropriately for community needs. This connects also to another important term that was discussed, “cognitive justice” (Monk et al., p.136). As described by Visvanathan (2006) in the chapter by Monk et al., “cognitive justice is the right of all forms of traditions of knowledge to co-exist in public without duress” (p.136).

This book marks the importance of building sustainable projects that go beyond temporary project-by-project partnerships as a way to build trust and care for local communities (Yadav et al., p. 126). In the example of students engaging in community service-learning opportunities (e.g., directed courses, work study), it is recommended that student community engagement should be encouraged to continue beyond an academic requirement (Dzulkifli et al., p. 273).

HELPFUL FRAMEWORKS

The visual frameworks presented in this book offer meaningful insights into knowledge engagement within CURP. A few particularly helpful examples among others in this book include: the knowledge culture framework which presents the interacting levels of knowledge spaces through a socio-ecological framework (Lepore & Jenni, p. 32); the comparison between academic and community knowledge cultures (Wood et al., p.197-198) and the more specific comparative example of the Maasi traditional knowledge culture versus higher learning education cultures (Rwiza et al., p. 165); as well as the dynamic cycle of engagement of various stakeholders ranging from students to advisors in the stakeholder map from a case study of the PRS & Acuamiramar project (Flores et al., p. 238). Visual tools,

tables, and frameworks presented are useful to understand the message of the book from multiple angles.

Overall, the K4C case studies presented in *Bridging knowledge cultures: Rebalancing power in the co-construction of knowledge* are an important and helpful read to understand the responsibility and leadership of universities in improving relations with and valuing local community knowledge systems. The review of K4C Consortium case studies can provide readers with the opportunity to learn approaches and methods for conducting research that build and advance local community development through the act of bridging knowledge cultures. As described, bridging knowledge cultures is an “art” (Tandon et al., p. 286), and it requires maintaining CURP with ethical responsibility and care. This book is designed to help university affiliates; however, it can cater to diverse individuals from social purpose organizations and other institutions working directly with local communities to value and legitimize different knowledge systems as a way to build meaningful partnerships.

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