

## ***Beyond the campus: Building a sustainable university–community partnership***

**By Debra A. Harkins with The Community Action Project Team. Charlotte, NC, Information Age Publishing, 2013, 204 pp. ISBN 978-1-62396-242-5 (hbk), ISBN 978-1-62396-241-8 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-62396-243-2 (e-book)**

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This book explores how to develop new relationships between university and community and especially within underserved communities. Such action research and civic engagement aims to prepare students towards becoming responsible citizens. In Part I, the author, insisting on the importance of civic engagement, explores how to build sustainable university–community partnerships. Part II indicates guideposts to develop a fair and reciprocal relationship between universities and civil society. The authors explain how civic engagement in one’s community, and social participation and creative citizenship cannot remain a secondary or marginal mission of post-secondary education. They show how the observed high dropout rate of low-income students is related to lack of relevance of higher education (its teaching, its research and its external involvement) in relation to the culture and concerns of the milieu of such students. To be significant and thus efficient, education and learning should be individually and socially relevant for the learners and their community. One of the goals is to give students skills and opportunities to mobilise their learned knowledge and skills and thus explore and experience effective citizenship. Part III draws lessons learned through this innovative experience.

This vision of a university–community relationship is explored theoretically and empirically. The authors document various institutional policies and practices and report feedback from students involved in innovative practices. They give examples of effective action in creating relevant learning and peaceful communities, the provision of conflict resolution training to parents and teachers in school, empathy building in complex and diversified communities, on how to give a voice to those with less power and privilege. They explain how such practices are becoming crucial for the educational achievement and empowerment of the increasing

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numbers of students coming from underprivileged milieus. Not surprisingly, many references are made throughout this book to Paulo Freire's vision on the "empowerment of the oppressed" (Freire 1970).<sup>1</sup>

This book exposes how the mission of civic engagement has been and too often still is overshadowed by the current prominence of the pursuit of individual goals disconnected from community perspectives and issues. The authors underline the still prevailing trend of dissociating academic learning from civic involvement by implementing curricula which are socio-culturally distant from the lives of the majority of students.

Though not referring to the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education,<sup>2</sup> which deals precisely with this issue, this book develops a similar concept of *community-based research* (CBR). It gives examples on how to co-create new knowledge through partnerships among universities (academics) and communities (civil society), leading to new capacities and new solutions to pressing problems in society.

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<sup>1</sup> Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.

<sup>2</sup> The UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education was established in 2012. It is based at the University of Victoria (UVic) and the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA). For more information, see <http://unescochair-cbrsr.org/index.php/about-unesco-chair/> [accessed 30 December 2016].