INTRODUCTION

# Integrating Asset-Based Community Development and Community-Based Research for Social Change: A Beginning

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## Abstract

This themed volume is grounded in a set of diverse case studies that bring community and university partners together using two aligned methodologies: community-based research (CBR), which evolved from higher education, and asset-based community development (ABCD), which evolved from community practice. The volume places these methodologies in dialogue with each other, to examine and begin to answer the question that guided the volume's call for articles: can CBR and ABCD be compatible agents in equitable and sustainable change? From the case studies emerge five themes that we explore in this guest editorial: (1) the benefits of community-university partnerships; (2) the risks of community-university partnerships; (3) notions of community expertise and 'community partner'; (4) the centrality of relationship-based methodologies in partner-building; and (5) explorations of power, equity and justice. The editorial opens and closes with discussion on the important systemic question of power imbalances between universities and communities, which has to be addressed for these methodologies to be effective, whether used on their own or in combination within community-university partnerships. It concludes with a discussion of the 'deep, wide and connected' community engagement that the articles as a whole suggest is necessary to have equitable and sustainable impact.

## Keywords

**Asset Based Community Development (ABCD); Community Based Research (CBR); Community-University Engagement; Power Imbalances; Equity; Sustainability**

## Introduction

Power differentials are a given when institutions engage with communities, especially those who have been historically marginalised. Research is typically driven by the agenda of university scholars and controlled by the resources at their disposal. Institution-based research most often focuses on community needs and deficits, which contributes to a dominant narrative of the institution having superior knowledge and expertise and the capacity to fix problems or bring solutions. Other areas of interaction, such as service-learning and outreach, can be similarly framed and implemented in top-down fashion (Lee & Espino 2010; Mitchell 2008). The imbalance in power and sense of agency is compounded when research, teaching and learning fail to acknowledge systemic issues, such as racism and disinvestment, as primary causes of the many needs these communities face.

These inequitable dynamics must be acknowledged and addressed through redefining the relationship between institutions and communities and through a shift in approaches and methods of collaboration. Two growing movements challenge this dominant narrative and set of assumptions. Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) has emerged as an important framework for bringing a strengths-based and relationship-centred approach to addressing challenges faced by communities and individuals. ABCD recognises that all communities have assets; that community members are the experts on their own lives and communities; and that change is most meaningful and most sustainable when it is driven by the community (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993; Mathie & Cunningham 2003). ABCD is grounded in the recognition that individuals and community groups have expertise, skills and resources that are essential to effecting positive social change in their local communities (Roy 2017). Today, ABCD work is employed by community-based organisations, non-profits, NGOs and funders throughout North America, Europe, Africa, Australia and other parts of the world.

Similarly, community-based research (CBR), with its emphasis on reciprocity and participatory methodologies, challenges conventional, hierarchical research frameworks that position expertise outside of communities and instead understands critical collaborative research to be *with* communities rather than *on* or *for* them. Community-university engaged research has been steadily growing in institutional legitimacy and visibility over the past few decades. Globally, there is now a significant and rich body of evidence attesting to the diversity of collaborative and innovative research initiatives underway, in which community partners participate as co-investigators and experts, rather than merely research 'subjects'. This movement has taken on various forms. Historically, Participatory Action Research (PAR), which originated in the Southern Hemisphere, integrates the expertise and lived experience of the community with the pursuit of knowledge around real-world issues that then leads to mobilisation for action and social change (Schubotz 2020). Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) grew out of the public health field and emphasises equitable relationships between the university and the community, with community members serving as co-investigators at every stage of the research process (Wallerstein & Duran 2017).

Both ABCD and CBR can be understood as part of a much larger, evolving and long-standing struggle by the many to be recognised by the few as legitimate 'considerers of the world', capable of improving the world (Freire 2017, p. 64). At the global level, there is growing momentum for asset-based community-university engagement, in all its guises (Farnell 2020; Hall & Tandon 2021). This volume seeks to contribute to this momentum. While it remains primarily a method employed in community-based work, attention to community assets is slowly being introduced into higher education research, teaching and learning (Chupp & Joseph 2010; Hamerlinck & Plaut 2014; Hirsch et al. 2023). In some cases, CBR initiatives that use

methods such as PAR or CBPR integrate an asset-based approach within their work, demonstrating the confluence of these two methods in practice ([Hall 2011](#); [Janzen & Ochocka 2020](#); [Stoecker & Tryon 2009](#); [Suarez-Balcazar et al. 2008](#)). This themed volume sets out to explore the benefits and challenges of a more explicit combination of these two aligned, yet distinct movements. It asks: are ABCD and CBR compatible agents in equitable and sustainable change?

## The guest editors

We came together as guest editors based on our shared interest in examining theory and practice linking community-based research to asset-based community development, to identify the benefits, as well as the limitations, of intentionally linking these two movements. The four of us approached this work from very different backgrounds, positions and geographies.

*Mark Chupp* identifies as a white, Christian, upper middle-class scholar-practitioner from Cleveland, Ohio, USA. His career began in restorative justice and peacemaking, working as a practitioner in the USA and Central America. After 15 years, he transitioned to an academic career focused on community-engaged research and community building. Mark provides training and consulting to community groups wanting to use strength-based approaches to change. He is in the social work faculty at Case Western Reserve University, where he chairs the Master of Social Work concentration in Community Practice for Social Change. He holds an MSW from the University of Michigan and a PhD in social welfare from Case Western Reserve University. Mark has been affiliated with the ABCD Institute at DePaul University since 2015.

*Jennifer Hirsch* identifies as a white, Jewish, upper middle-class scholar-practitioner from Chicago, Illinois, USA. Her career has centred on facilitating university-community partnerships, using her training as an applied cultural anthropologist. Drawing on her background as an administrator of participatory action research, Jennifer works to apply ABCD within higher education, focusing specifically on research and teaching partnerships related to sustainability and environmental justice in the Southeastern United States. She has spent almost 20 years living in the U.S. South. Jennifer received her doctorate degree from Duke University for researching a grassroots economic justice network, and currently works as the Senior Director of the Center for Sustainable Communities Research and Education at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Jennifer has been affiliated with the ABCD institute at DePaul University since 2013.

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*Hanna Nel* is an emeritus professor in the Department of Social Work and Community Development at the University of Johannesburg and a passionate researcher and educator. The focus of her research in the last 15 years has primarily been on community development, and specifically asset-based citizen-led development (ABCD) in South Africa. She has a publication list of 59 articles and chapters in accredited journals and books. She was a co-author with two colleagues of a book on community development, of which the second edition was published in 2021. Hanna has guided 59 post-graduate students at master's and doctoral levels to graduation.

## This volume

The Call for Papers asked authors to respond to any or all of the following questions:

1. How does asset-based community development relate to and interact with academic research? Who benefits from this interaction?
2. Can an asset-based orientation help position community participants as peer 'experts' alongside their academic partners, sharing power and authority in the collaboration? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. What are the benefits and risks of bringing an institution-based research focus to place-based community development initiatives?
4. What examples of community-based research utilising an asset-based orientation already exist? Share success stories, but also mishaps, misadventures and serendipities: lessons learnt the hard way.

The guest editors, *Gateways* Executive Editor and members of the journal's Editorial Committee received many abstracts before selecting and working with the authors in this volume, who represent a wide variety of contexts, programs and approaches. As we worked on the manuscripts, beginning with two online writers' workshops in which the authors also provided feedback to each other, it became clear that each article provided examples of how CBR and ABCD come together in practice. Just over half of the articles feature university and community-based co-authorship teams.

Through this richly varied empirical and experiential lens, five core themes emerged from the articles:

1. Benefits associated with community-university interactions and partnerships;
2. Risks associated with community-university interactions and partnerships;
3. The nature of community expertise and diverse definitions of 'community partner';
4. The centrality of relationship-based methodologies to ensure lasting, trusting and equitable partnerships; and
5. Critical and practical explorations of larger, ongoing discourses of power, equity and justice.

These themes point back to this volume's core question: are asset-based community development and community-based research compatible agents in equitable and sustainable change? The articles suggest that they can be, and that they have enormous potential to drive social, cognitive and institutional change. At the same time, they highlight the importance of continuing to ask, at each stage of research: 'whose knowledge counts?' The themes and this important question serve as the organisational basis for the discussion that follows.

## Theme 1: Benefits associated with community-university interactions and partnerships

The case studies in this volume offer clear evidence of the benefits of taking an asset-based approach to institution-based research intended to advance community development. In general, an asset-based approach promotes a shift to a more equitable and reciprocal relationship between the institution and the community, and to ways of working together that strengthen communities, institutions and their partnerships. When properly implemented, ABCD principles help move groups from traditional top-down practices to participatory and collaborative practices ([Lasker & Weiss 2003](#)).

The articles demonstrate a variety of benefits, and the ways in which they are multi-directional. Perhaps the most vital benefit – and the foundational aim – of an asset-based approach to community development, with or without institutional partners, is that it widens the frame of what is considered a valuable asset.

Kitamura et al., for example, propose that among the assets of rural communities in Japan (in this case, Noto) are the 'traditional social-ecological systems of satoyama and satoumi' (landscapes and seascapes), traditional food-producing systems and various cultural assets, 'including traditional festivals in each local community, the purpose of which is to express reverence and gratitude to the deities of nature' (p. 3). Brewer and Kliewer reference the work of bell hooks (2009) to argue for the importance of everyday spaces as community assets, explaining that '[w]henever possible, our conversations take place on front porches to recognise the cultural role of front porches as a space of civility and fellowship, and, at times, female and anti-racist resistance …' (p. 5). In a third, very different setting – that of an online community selling handmade goods – Close and Lohr give a compelling example of the power of an asset-based approach to inform community-based research for change. They designed a methodology based on ABCD principles and included the concept of expertise as a community asset:

> *We posited that the knowledge of what an ideal marketplace platform should look like – an 'asset of the mind' – was already distributed among the many members of the ISG [Indie Sellers Guild] and the wider handmade and vintage communities. What the ISG then needed was a way to concretise that knowledge into expertise, which could form the basis of the accreditation program* (p. 8).

At the same time, many articles made plain the ways in which institutional knowledge and methods can add rigour and credibility to partnerships, helping to increase the effectiveness of community-driven change efforts. Coley et al. describe the work of the Ormond Center in Durham, North Carolina, USA, as a way for the community to benefit from partnering with an institution grounded in disciplinary-based research and training. Through a community listening and learning process, themes emerge from the analysis that then become the focus of educational sessions in the community. For this careful work, a 'ground truthing' tool is used in interviewing so as to learn from community members what they see as the heart of the issue. Goodman et al. employ service learning and the cooperative extension models from an asset perspective to create community partnerships that are mutually beneficial. Students learn in real-world settings as they strengthen community groups by bringing survey research, mapping and community-engagement methods to the projects. Another benefit of the experiential learning associated with service learning and cooperative extension programs is the promotion of active citizenship, social responsibility and a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between academia and society. Goodman et al. show how resources, research-centric information and support from the institution help build community power and leadership.

Watson et al. offer a third example. They note that academic partnerships can enhance the community organisations' evaluation capacity and credibility, helping them to satisfy funders' expectations for result-based accountability. These authors explore the important role played by place-based initiatives (PBIs): non-profit, semi-outsider organisations. The authors conducted 23 semi-structured interviews with leaders and staff from three PBIs in Charlotte, North Carolina, USA. They found that PBIs 'play a critical role in coordinating resources, services and expertise across multiple organisations and sectors, and that this coordination can build on local assets to transform neighbourhoods' social, structural, physical and economic conditions and promote intergenerational economic mobility' (p. 3). At the same time, PBIs must meet often demanding funding requirements. One way to do this, without sacrificing community-led goals, is by leveraging partnerships with academic institutions to incorporate both ABCD and CBR principles into their work. Further, academic partners also have the standing to challenge the exclusive use of traditional metrics for reporting and instead co-create new metrics more consistent with an asset-based approach.

The above examples point to a deeper benefit of equitable and asset-based partnerships: the means to challenge systems and power dynamics in general. Many authors argue that institutions can actively help drive a shift in power by connecting groups to resources and resource networks. Goodman et al. (p. 20) suggest that institutions should take a 'build together' approach to combat 'deficit thinking and the systems of oppression and inequality that exist within the landscape of funding sources'. Kitamura et al. (p. 2)

explore the creation of an accessible, online CBR database by a transdisciplinary community of practice in rural Noto, Japan. Their exploratory case study argues that through the establishment of a community-managed mechanism like a database, scholarly outputs 'can themselves become an asset for use by local communities, and thereby help to address pressing issues, such as the wellbeing of the people'. Similarly, Morales (p. 23) develops an Asset Based Critical Engagement framework for service-learning courses to leverage 'the strengths, talents and skills of students, faculty, and community to create classrooms and community spaces that critically analyze and interrogate systems of inequality'.

## Theme 2: Risks associated with community-university interactions and partnerships

Along with the benefits come risks. A common critique of ABCD is that focusing on community assets risks ignoring systemic inequities and the responsibility of the state and institutions to effect social change. An asset-based approach can lay the responsibility for improvement onto individuals and the community, in a variation of the old trope, 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps'. In their exploration of place-based organisations, Watson et al. note that such organizations, while effective in building trust with local communities, are sometimes pressured to focus on accountability to funders' demands for impact, leading to an unfortunate shift away from community-driven goals to results-based management. Similarly, Coley et al. note the recent slowing in faith-based community--development organisations' asset-based social change efforts, and a shift instead to more charity-based work that does not address the root causes of poverty. While acknowledging this decline, these authors from the Ormond Center at Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC, USA, seek to 'pick up on the faith-based community's long, if intermittent, history of profound social innovation' by arguing for a 'renewed imagination and intentionally practiced asset-based community development' in critical and participatory collaboration with other faith-based partners (p. 3).

At the same time, in response to the academy's traditional deficit-based lens, there is an emerging shift by researchers and professional practitioners towards asset-based approaches to collaborative research, understood as engagement *with*, rather than on or for, communities. Sheppard and Fuerst's article offers a reflective case study of the challenges involved in navigating these multiple currents. They present a discussion of an evaluation assessment in a diverse, complex and traumatised community that is far from 'power-neutral' (p. 3). Out of a sensitivity to the horrific nature of a mass shooting, these authors intentionally chose not to suggest an alternative approach to the needs-based evaluation requested by the community, which appeared at first to be the result of 'unified community intentions' (p. 2). Only later did they discover in the archived material that some in the community had earlier created a strength-based, eight-point vision of a thriving community.

In retrospect, the authors recognised that they had missed an opportunity to leverage their authority as outside evaluators to propose and design a process that could have integrated the 'community-voiced asset-based vision of recovery and growth with the needs-based assessment required by applications for grants and emergency funding' (Sheppard & Fuerst, p. 6). They note the importance of using a 'trauma informed lens' when working with communities, as it can reveal 'possible challenges to a best practice like ABCD that can include a lack of trust and social cohesion; lack of stability, reliability and consistency; inability to vision the future; disempowerment and lack of a sense of community ownership; high level of personal needs; and the real depth and breadth of community needs' (Weinstein, Wolin & Rose 2014, p. 6; quoted in Sheppard & Fuerst, p. 10-11).

Another risk pertains to the institution getting ahead of the community by leading the research agenda and implementation without first being properly connected with the community through trusting and mutually beneficial relationships. Or, conversely, deciding when partnership goals have been met. Bhatt and

Singh relate how a partnership involving a university, a community organisation and a rural community of artisanal potters was challenged after the newly built and installed kilns were damaged. They write (p. 10):

> *While the de jure responsibility for a linear community-development framework would seem to have halted with the design, development and installation of this technological artifact, adhering to the iterative and integrated framework, the academic team de facto assumed their responsibility as partners with the village community, to ensure smooth adaption to, and operation of, this co-developed technological artifact. In view of this, the team decided to conduct another round of stakeholder consultation to gauge their concerns and perceptions of these issues.*

This example points to another very important aspect of community-university partnerships: the vital need for equitable sharing of resources, both social and material, such as funding, time and decision-making authority. All of these examples point to the larger risk to meaningful and mutually beneficial research collaborations, which is the conservative, self-preserving nature of institutions that limit systems change thinking and action. Collaboration and engagement are always at risk of becoming self-serving, at least in part, rather than a vehicle for substantive change.

These risks and challenges are significant and not to be taken lightly. Beyond limiting effectiveness, they can actually create harm in communities that have already endured marginalisation, disinvestment and exclusion. This collection of articles is rich in detail and insight, but our discussion below focuses on two key issues occurring throughout the article: recognition of community assets and expertise, and the importance of leveraging both ABCD and CBR to effect meaningful change; in effect, the very heart of what ABCD and CBR offer to community-university partnerships. By paying critical, material and methodological attention to both, partnerships can do a better job of negotiating the complex and entrenched issues of power, legitimacy and resource sharing.

## Theme 3: The nature of community expertise and diverse definitions of 'community partner'

An ABCD approach explicitly challenges the deficit model that marginalised communities are often subjected to by institutions such as universities. Many of the case studies in this volume shed vivid light on the strength and diversity of community assets. Bhatt and Singh, for example, explain how an asset-based approach enabled the university-based team to recognise the existing local assets, skills and resources of their rural community partners as complements to the researchers' technical knowledge. Paying attention to all of these factors was essential if the new kilns were to be robust, used and community owned. They write: 'The academics acknowledged pottery making as a traditional, intergenerational knowledge, constituting the village's cultural asset. Secondly, the local pottery kiln technology was recognised as a community asset' (p. 14). By recognising the local kiln technology as valuable, a co-created solution was developed that modified and improved it, rather than replaced or rejected it. This outcome rested on an earlier recognition: the need for widespread involvement, which in this case included potters as well as non-potter families, community leaders, academics from a leading technical institute and the National Cooperative Union of India, which served as a trusted bridge between academia and the rural community.

Close and Lohr offer another excellent example of how an attentive asset-based framework can facilitate recognition, articulation and mobilisation of *collective* expertise among community members, which can then lead to wider social change. The authors note that among online independent sellers (of handmade goods, in this case), there is an overrepresentation of 'those who have been pushed out of the traditional workforce: people with disabilities or chronic health issues, caregivers, and trans and non-binary individuals' (p. 4). Yet those crafters began self-identifying as 'capable agents of change', which included instigating the research shared in this article and, eventually, forcing policy change. The authors (p. 10) write:

*Indie sellers are often told, particularly by platforms, that any problems they encounter are a result of deficits in their craft and business skills. A proposed solution is for them to individually seek help from outside experts, for example, taking a business course. However, we argue that this is wrong on multiple levels. Our research demonstrates that, while any one individual seller may be able to improve on a skill, creative independent sellers collectively possess clear expertise. They are 'content experts', possessing gifts both of the hands and the heart.*

Morales' conceptual contribution to critical and asset-based engagement emphasises the importance of recognising indigenous knowledge. She argues that for institutional-based assets and practices, such as service-learning courses, to be beneficial, it is essential to challenge the traditional framework of whiteness and class privilege that can typify such offerings, particularly in predominantly white institutions. In her research, she uses Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth to refer to the expertise that her interviewees – Latinx students at a Hispanic Serving Institution in the USA – bring to their education and to their service-learning experiences. According to Yosso, community cultural wealth includes 'aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance assets' – assets that educators can use to better 'understand how Latinx students' access and experience college, from an asset-based perspective' (Morales, p. 22). Morales advocates that institutions develop a philosophy of engagement that sees community partners as co-educators, and for institution-based educators to think deeply about what it means to take an ABCD approach to classroom practices and pedagogy:

*When applied to service learning, asset-based community development becomes an integral component of a social justice oriented course. It addresses issues of power, challenges students to look beyond how they might have been taught to view communities and their residents, and invites recognition of the local knowledge of community residents …* (p. 9)

Relatedly, in the case studies shared by Goodman et al., an extension agent used this same approach to act as a facilitator rather than a problem solver, by bringing community members together to 'focus on the strength of our county. When our community comes together, we understand our opportunities to address challenges' (p. 16). These detailed and nuanced depictions of community are important because they place any collaboration with institutions of higher education within wider sociopolitical and historical contexts – which are complex, changing and contested. They emphatically show that terms such as 'community', 'expertise' and 'partnership' are layered with complexity. Indeed, some university personnel are members of the community being researched. The case studies of Sheppard & Fuerst and Watson et al. advise against treating the community as one monolithic entity, inappropriately assuming that a group of residents is representative or can speak on behalf of the entire community.

## Theme 4: The centrality of relationship-based methodologies to ensure lasting, trusting and equitable partnerships

Perhaps not surprisingly, there is consequently a great variety and richness to the partnerships described in these articles. Partnerships include anchor institutions with local faith-based organisations and community stakeholders; a transdisciplinary community of practice involving researchers, local government officials and engagement practitioners; and a range of institutions of higher education partnering with an equally varied range of place-based organisations. However, a common theme among this diversity is that organisations and partnerships leverage both ABCD and CBR methodologies in their work together. Collaborative and action-oriented community-based research (CBR) approaches are grounded in equity-based, non-hierarchical and reciprocal principles and practices designed to empower community members in the research process. ABCD approaches stress that the community is an intellectual space, with its own strengths, networks and agency, which can be forgotten in the rush to engagement. There is strength in their

combined use. This leveraging is done for a number of reasons, but we suggest it is profoundly connected with the desire to drive change: epistemological, material, methodological and social.

Watson et al. (p. 15) found that place-based organisations (PBIs) that utilise both ABCD and CBR can act as ' the conduits for both creating space for community agents to enact asset-based community development and the mediator of community-based research higher education partnerships'. A number of articles provide detailed discussion of the epistemological and conceptual basis for their partnerships as a means to co-creating situated knowledge that drives change. Brewer and Kliewer, for example, developed their Front Porch Development Procedure (FPDP) by combining both ABCD and PAR. They explain (p. 26):

> *Changes that follow Front Porch Conversations are often small – organizing a community clean-up or a collective social event – but continue to develop beyond the conversation and the outside agency that serves as steward. While the outcome may not appear liberating at first glance, each instance represents a small group of individuals who create new forms of knowledge and act collectively – usually for the first time – to improve their own quality of life by leveraging neighbourhood assets.*

In fact, a number of authors argue that using ABCD to recognise and build on the key assets of community expertise to strengthen relational networks is crucial to partnerships' goal of achieving lasting impact. Bhatt and Singh argue for the importance of building collaborative networks if long-term sustainable solutions are to be attained. More emphatically, they argue that such work 'attempts to create knowledge equilibrium by bridging the gap between dominant knowledge and systematically repressed knowledge(s). In this way, these approaches can aid in decolonising knowledge and power' (Bhatt & Singh, p. 18).

Just as some focus on the conceptual underpinnings to a combined ABCD and CBR framework, other articles concentrate on the methodological and process implications. Kitamura et al. (p. 2) argue that '[r]esearch towards identifying the actual processes for achieving ABCD through CBR has only just begun'. These authors propose that 'two facilitating factors are needed': a transdisciplinary community of practice (TDCOP) and a well-designed facilitation mechanism – in this case, an online accessible database – to ensure that the research process is collaborative, inclusive and action-oriented. Indeed, a number of articles present complex and ongoing undertakings. As one example, Coley et al. (p. 5) provides the following description:

> *We expand this concept [CBR] to advance 'faith-based community-academic partnered participatory research' (FB-CPPR), by asking, 'How might a faith-based community-academic partnered participatory research team motivated through teaching, training and learning be deployed to address complex social barriers to thriving in their local context, and thereby seek opportunities for positive social change? Moreover, what are potential social impact projects that might spring from faith-based community-academic partnered participatory research teams? Lastly, how might the collaboration partners implement the projects together?*

Across these articles, we see how a focus on equity and justice is able to be explicitly articulated as partnership and project goals, through the harnessing of both ABCD and CBR. For institutions and community organisations, this involves being up front about naming and addressing power imbalances, creating infrastructure for resilient, lasting partnerships, and addressing the issue of unequal resource distribution and the need for material institutional support from the academic partner. Watson et al. caution that, when not fully invested in, even participatory methods like CBPR can exacerbate the academic-community divide. Goodman et al. point to resource allocation as one key aspect of institutional power-sharing, with particular emphasis on compensating partners financially for their time and expertise, as well as sharing resources such as 'funding opportunities and networks, intellectual property, and physical meeting spaces' (p. 21). Morales focuses especially on interpersonal relationship building, pointing to the importance

of educators examining their own – and that of their students' – positionality. Here, reciprocity is integral to relationship-based service learning, where 'engagement for upliftment' is in the service of bettering, empowering or uplifting the community. In so doing, the community and students receive and experience mutual upliftment. Sheppard and Fuerst highlight the need to listen, not just to the most empowered within organisations, and reflect on what may not be appearing on agendas.

## Theme 5: Critical and practical explorations of larger, ongoing discourses of power, equity and justice

The articles in this themed volume on ABCD and CBR add to our understanding of what it means to share power and authority in a community-academic partnership – and why this even matters. As mentioned above in the discussion on Theme 2: Risks, ABCD is often critiqued for paying inadequate attention to power and ignoring structural and historical inequities, including, but not limited to, race, despite its intention to flip power dynamics on their head by privileging communities over institutions. A few of the articles in this themed volume point to particular practices that might do a lot to help researchers, practitioners and community partners engage on more equitable ground.

One such practice is to take care to employ the ABCD principles of centring the stories, experiences and voices of traditionally marginalised groups (e.g. youth, the elderly, people with disabilities, etc.) in research and action. Morales' focus on Latinx students brings issues of historical marginalisation to the fore in an interesting twist. Through an examination of interpersonal relationship-building, Morales points to the importance of examining *our own* – and *our students'* – positionality, reframing it as an asset that strengthens local knowledge and connections. Similarly, upon reflecting on the evaluation process, in which white people engaged as white evaluators of a Black community, Sheppard et al. (p. 8) posited the imposition of an ABCD approach as potentially a 'white saviour complex (meaning that we had the solution, i.e. proposing ABCD as an alternative to the community desire to assess needs)' that seemingly 'placed the burden on them to "fix" everything that had gone wrong'. Their introspective reflection situates research and practice relationships within historical and systemic contexts, and warns against imposing ABCD upon communities when they are asking for different approaches.

Sheppard et al., along with Goodman et al., emphasise one way in which ABCD could be used specifically to focus on structural inequities, and that is to make sure to partner with community groups other than the most empowered community-based organisations, thus echoing ABCD's focus on informal associations rather than formal organisations. Furthermore, Goodman et al. point out the need for equity and justice to be explicitly articulated as partnership and project goals.

## In Conclusion

This themed volume set out to explore the question: Are asset-based community development and community-based research compatible agents in equitable and sustainable change? This Introduction explored five key themes from the articles in this volume – (1) the benefits of community-university partnerships; (2) the risks of community-university partnerships; (3) notions of community expertise and 'community partner'; (4) the centrality of relationship-based methodologies in partner building; and (5) exploration of power, equity and justice. In the end, of course, all of this work should be judged by its impact – by the changes that it leads to in both communities and institutions involved in the partnerships. A number of the authors in this volume argue that meaningful, sustainable impact requires deep, wide and *connected* community engagement. Bhatt and Singh echo a common refrain among many of the articles when they write: building 'a collaborative framework, based on mutual trust, respect and benefit … will

ensure that community knowledge is acknowledged, its opinions are heard, and its needs are met, resulting in long-term sustainable solutions' (p. 4). A key takeaway is that ABCD and CBR practitioners and researchers need to be not only skilled listeners, but skilled conveners, able to nurture collective wisdom.

Deep, wide and connected community engagement will not happen on its own or through short-term research or narrowly prescribed service-learning projects. Creating sustainable and equitable relationships with tangible benefits to both the community and the university requires a commitment by the university to share power and to invest in building trusting relationships over time. Just as a well-organised and unified community is more effective in working towards change, universities need to ensure that the approaches to research and educational initiatives are operating from a shared set of values and principles of practice that guide university-community engagement. Intentionally bringing community members and university representatives together to co-create these principles and learn from each other increases trust and their shared capacity for community problem solving (Chupp et al. 2021).

The articles included in this volume provide a broad range of theoretical frameworks and case studies demonstrating the productive – and potentially productive – ways in which ABCD and CBR, as methodologies grounded in community and in higher education, respectively, can be used in tandem to nurture deeper, more productive, and more impactful community-university partnerships. There are so many complementary practices among these fields that we wonder if perhaps someday the two fields will merge into one field that is greater than the sum of its parts.

## Acknowledgements

## References

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