

Leaders in the Civic Engagement Movement: Budd Hall, UNESCO co-Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education at the University of Victoria  
by Lorlene Hoyt



February signals the eighth installment of our Leaders in the Civic Engagement Movement series. This issue features Dr. Budd Hall, Professor and Director of the Office of Community Based Research at the University of Victoria, UNESCO co-Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, and Secretary of the Global Alliance for Community-Engaged Research.

“Everything in life is connected.” This was Dr. Budd Hall’s opening line after I asked him to explain to me why he is committed to civic engagement in higher education. Born in the U.S., Dr. Hall studied political science as an undergraduate at Michigan State University, a land-grant university with a strong connection to Africa. In his third year, Dr. Hall participated in a U.S.-Nigeria student exchange program where he heard new and exciting African perspectives on History, Political Science and Anthropology from Nigerian professors and began asking the question, “Whose knowledge counts?”

When Dr. Hall went to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) for a doctorate in Comparative and International Education, he was also working as Director of Research at the Institute of Adult Education at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. It was a serendipitous encounter with a visitor from Dar es Salaam on UCLA’s campus that led him to this post. Here he was “profoundly influenced” by the late President Julius Nyerere who had written on “the capacity of education to unchain people.” In 1971, Dr. Hall invited Paulo Freire to Tanzania to “share his ideas about research methods,” which included the notion that in social science, “ideology determines the methodology (of searching) or of knowing.”

With roots and family in Canada, Dr. Hall accepted a position as Director of Research at the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) in 1975 based in Toronto where he supported an international participatory research network and later served as the ICAE Secretary-General. Feeling in 1991 it was time for a change, Dr. Hall joined the University of Toronto’s Adult Education and Community Development department where he served as chair.

In 2001, Dr. Hall transitioned to the University of Victoria as Dean for the Faculty of Education. At “Uvic” he found there was substantial “interest in engaged scholarship” and set out to create the Office of Community Based Research, which he led for five years beginning in 2006. While he is proud of this achievement, he is also quick to explain that the establishment of the Office of Community Based Research was a challenging task. In his own words, he “faced skepticism” because some of his colleagues weren’t familiar with engaged scholarship and doubted its “rigor.” But Dr. Hall, who sees himself as “of the community” and passionate about “how higher education can serve the communities where they are located,” deployed his community

organizing skills. A graduate student carried out a campus-wide study revealing that community based research was alive and well throughout the university. He supported the Vice-President for Research who held a symposium to raise the visibility of this work and to connect people from different corners of campus; about 150 people came to share their stories. He worked with a task force to tap community opinions about a way forward and was pleased to be asked to become the founding Director.

Today, Dr. Hall is Secretary of the Global Alliance of Community Engaged Research (GACER), a “loose” international network of representatives of regional and global networks that support community university research partnerships. He also holds the first United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, a position that he shares with the New Delhi-based Dr. Rajesh Tandon, President of the Society for Participatory Research in Asia.

As we neared the close of our conversation and without prompting, Dr. Hall remarked, “You are right. It is a movement and talking about it that way is important.” He then pointed to two challenges facing the civic engagement movement in higher education. “One challenge,” he explained, “is to make sure the new structure and practices of engagement stay attached to values that are linked to the common good.” He shared his concern that civic engagement could become “part of the status quo.” The other challenge “is to build research capacity and knowledge mobilization capacity into community organizations so they are truly equal partners.” The moment is “ripe,” we agreed. The movement has momentum. The proof of the value added by working in these new ways will be seen in our ability to have a positive impact on the critical issues of our times such as, “violence against women, climate change, homelessness, food security.” He closed by saying “We hope to show that the democratic creation and use of knowledge can bring new hope to all our communities.”