

Connected Communities: An international perspective

Podcast Transcript

VO: Mary Brydon-Miller is director of the University of Cincinnati's Action Research Center, and professor of educational and community-based action research within the university's Education Studies Program. In the summer of 2013, she gave a presentation at the Connected Communities 2013 summit, to talk about community engagement and action research from an international perspective. Since the term "action research" was first used, a little under 70 years ago, it's evolved, with different methodologies appearing the world over. Even at the Connected Communities 2013 summit, Professor Brydon Miller was encouraged by the diverse range of methodologies being showcased, including use of the arts to engage with communities across the UK...

MBM: The idea of using arts, whether its film, theatre, photography, visual arts, music, not just in the context of building communities which it's always been used, but as a way of generating knowledge, communicating knowledge is really pretty new, and it's still trying to gain traction and acceptance in broader research circles, but one of the things you saw at the summit was just the number of ways in which the arts are being used, in really engaging, creative, interesting ways.

VO: One key concern however is how researchers work directly with communities. Professor Brydon Miller's recent work has focused on better understanding the importance of community based Research Ethics since even in her own city of Cincinnati, mistakes have been made in the past...

MBM: For many communities, and I certainly see this in community settings here in the city of Cincinnati, it's not that we just go in as someone people in the community are unfamiliar with, we going on the backs of years and years and years of researchers taking advantage of people in communities, that's particularly true in this country in the African American communities where poor

people, African Americans, other minorities, have been used as research subjects in research whether it's health research, education research that has not addressed their needs, has often times been - certainly not contributed to people's well-being, and so you start out 10 steps behind and just going in as someone who is unknown to that community so it takes a very long time to build trust and it's very easy to undermine trust when someone comes in and wants to collect a lot of data - it's what I call "bungee research" when researchers expect to be able to drop into a community and grab a bunch of data and pop back out again, and I think most communities are onto that, are demanding more, more participation, more control, more opportunity for there to be reciprocity for the learning that takes place - it's one of the sort of steps forward that I think has been really important: that communities are becoming more savvy consumers of research and demanding more.

VO: According to Professor Brydon Miller, the formula for successful community engaged research is when it can change things for the better, the idea that research can make a difference - not just for the academic, but for the people involved at the heart of that research...

MBM: One of the ways we think about what it means to do good research is based on this notion of catalytic validity, that research is valid when it is the catalyst for change, and whether that is catalyst for change in your own community setting, which we hope happens, is one part of it, but it's also about being a catalyst for the development of projects in other places, I can see that happening, I could hear that happening among the participants at the Connected Community Summit, and I certainly took away... ..you know, Sarah Banks for instance, who is at Durham, is doing work that is very similar to some of the work that I'm doing in research ethics, she is going to be coming to the United States, to the Community Campus Partnerships for Health conference, together with colleagues from Canada, then she's going to come down here to Cincinnati and talk, and then the two of us are going to Indiana University to the Pointer Centre on Research Ethics and do a presentation there and so that kind of cross-fertilisation I'm already experiencing happening.

VO: Back at the 2013 Connected Communities summit, Professor Brydon Miller was heartened to see people also sharing ideas and experience. She suggests that such networking, is the trigger to greater opportunities for research collaboration, knowledge exchange and community involvement.

MBM: Networking gets used in a very, sort of, simplistic way but I am firmly convinced that the future of community engaged research depends upon us building a very strong network and building relationships and nurturing those relationships, whether its relationships with our colleagues, our community partners, our students, and I just saw this very, very vibrant community of people doing this kind of work just in an incredible range of settings coming together and really being excited about what one another were doing - it was very much about meeting people, supporting one another, marvelling at what one another was doing, just need to build that kind of very vibrant community. I was so impressed at the Connected Community summit that I just want you all to know that I think it's an extraordinary project, you know, anything I can do to support you all. And you know one of the things that most impressed me was being gay to rent of people from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, because there must've been about a half dozen AHRC folks there and obviously really knowledgeable about what's going on, very enthusiastic and at the same time y'all made a point of saying, we don't want to call the shots, so that kind of recognising that you're in a support role, but a really strong, engaged support role, I was just really impressed - I don't know funding agencies here who do that, so hats off to all of you.