Book Review

Community-based research with vulnerable populations: Ethical, inclusive and
sustainable frameworks for knowledge generation, edited by Lesley Wood

Prosper Lunga
North-West University, South Africa
plunga40@gmail.com

This book, Community-Based Research With Vulnerable Populations: Ethical, Inclusive and Sustainable Frameworks for Knowledge Generation, forms part of the Palgrave Studies in Education Research Methods series. The books in this series investigate and speculate on enabling, inclusive educational approaches that help to position education as a driver of social transformation—rather than as a contributor to economic and social marginalisation. As noted in its foreword by UNESCO co-Chairs for Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, Budd Hall and Rajesh Tandon, the book helps us to understand "the complex relationships and transformative potential of learning, knowledge creation, ethics and action in the context of social justice" (Tandon & Hall, 2022, p. v).

Being asked to review this book allowed me, a novice researcher, to hone my understanding of how to conduct community-based research (CBR) with people from diverse backgrounds, sensitising me to the importance of learning how to engage with individuals who have valuable knowledge and experience to share. On reading the book, I came to understand that the greatest advantage of CBR, as explained in the first chapter, is that it does not only focus on specific research outcomes but also on community education and the emancipation of marginalised populations. CBR affords universities and their research staff the opportunity to partner with communities to pursue social change for social justice outcomes (see Strand et al., 2003).

The book is divided into three parts: the first positions CBR within higher education, the second offers case studies that show how CBR can be operationalised in higher education, and the third suggests guidelines for policy and practice of CBR in higher education. The first chapter provides a sound foundation for the book, explaining the basic principles and paradigm of CBR, defining core concepts in the book, and presenting the core thesis of the book: the need for the university to pursue research partnerships with those most affected by complex social issues. This chapter highlights the challenges

facing researchers doing CBR within a system that is rigid and geared for more traditional forms of research. Importantly, the first chapter defines the somewhat controversial term, vulnerability, clearly positioning this as a structurally imposed state rather than one of personal deficit. The aim of the book is to generate theory and provide examples of practice to aid in the development of an ethical, inclusive, and sustainable framework for CBR to generate knowledge in a democratic way.

Chapter 2 explains the ethical principles of CBR as well as the ethical dilemmas it poses. This chapter was an eye-opener for me because I had not previously realised the complexity of the ethical issues involved in CBR. The last chapter in Part 1 explains in detail how the editor and her colleagues researched and designed a CBR course for academics. I found the detail of the process given in this chapter useful as a compass to show direction to any researcher who might want to engage in research to bring about change. The most important thing to learn for any researcher wishing to do CBR is to make the shift to a participatory, transformative paradigm. It is clearly not an easy thing to unlearn after years of conducting researcher-driven studies, but this chapter offers an outline of how academics can capacitate themselves to conduct ethical, inclusive, and sustainable CBR.

The various case studies in Part 2 of the book helped me to understand the different ways that the university can engage with marginalised communities to help them improve their own lives. They provide empirical evidence of the power of full participation of the community in generating knowledge relevant to their context. Although the chapters were all written by different authors and conducted in different contexts, they give pointers as to how academics can build sustainable relationships in communities, grounded in specific life-enhancing values and principles. The use of Indigenous theories and knowledge has helped people of different backgrounds, ages, and experience to work together to find solutions to the problems they face in South Africa as well as in other countries such as Colombia, Ireland, Australia, and Tanzania.

The final chapters in Part 3 offer examples of frameworks to conduct CBR and argue that it can also be positioned to strengthen the community college system as a means of transformative adult education for the most marginalised people. The concluding chapter brings it all together in the form of a framework for CBR.

I found this book useful to enhance the capacity of academics in higher education institutions to conduct CBR and partner with marginalised populations to generate relevant, useful, and contextualised knowledge. The content of the book is rich and well organised under different topics in the respective chapters, which makes it easy for readers to understand. Although the book's emphasis is on educational CBR in higher education institutions, I found it to be valuable and well suited to researchers and practitioners in areas beyond education, for example, those in community development, health sciences, social sciences, and other related fields.

In my opinion, the scholarly arguments in the book—as well as the detailed case studies—are of great value in helping those involved in CBR to really understand the field and how to begin to conduct engaged research. As a novice community-based researcher, I feel I now have a better understanding of CBR and the ethical issues around it.

References

Strand, K. J., Cutforth, N., Stoecker, R., Marullo, S., & Donohue, P. (2003). *Community-based research and higher education: Principles and practices.* Jossey-Bass.

Tandon, R., & Hall, B. (2022). Foreword. In L. Wood (Ed.), *Community-based research with vulnerable populations: Ethical, inclusive and sustainable frameworks for knowledge generation*. Palgrave Macmillan.