

A Change of Leadership for the Engaged Scholar Journal

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Exchanges

In the Exchanges, we present conversations with scholars and practitioners of community engagement, responses to previously published material, and other reflections on various aspects of community-engaged scholarship meant to provoke further dialogue and discussion. In this section, we invite our readers to offer their thoughts and ideas on the meanings and understandings of engaged scholarship, as practiced in local or faraway communities, diverse cultural settings, and in various disciplinary contexts. We especially welcome community-based scholars' views and opinions on their collaborations with university-based partners in particular and engaged scholarship in general.

In this issue, we discuss the recent changeover of leadership at The Engaged Scholar Journal with **Dr. Natalia Khanenko-Friesen**, who has recently left the University of Saskatchewan to assume new posts at the University of Alberta, and **Dr. Lori Bradford**. Managing Editor **Dr. Penelope (Penny) Sanz** takes both through a conversation about the inception, current state, and future goals of the journal, and their reflections on engaged scholarship as a career.

A Change of Leadership for the ESJ

Penelope Sanz: Natalia, can you please take us back to the time when the journal was still an idea?

Natalia Khanenko-Friesen: We started building the journal in 2013-14. One can say it was already a high time for community-engaged research in Canada, and the need was already felt across the country for a national publishing venue. When it came to building networks in the field, the University of Saskatchewan (USask) had been one of the leading institutions and had hosted the first-ever C2U Expo, a biannual international symposium on Community-University engagement and partnership. Other universities were also interested and involved in community engagement. A Community Engagement Advisor, Dr. Keith Carlson — a historian with experience in what it means to be an effective communicator between academic and non-academic domains — worked with USask's Vice-President Advancement and Community Engagement, Dr. Heather Magotiaux, in devising a journal profiling community-engaged work done at the University.

Keith reached out to me when I was about to go to Ukraine with my students, and he said, "Here it is. Would you be interested in being the person overseeing the creation of such a journal?" I embraced the opportunity: I became the journal's convener and oversaw the

formation and work of the ESJ Working Committee (involving exceptional Community Engaged Scholarship [CES] scholars such as Isobel Findlay, Nazeem Muhajarine, and others who were pioneers of CES on our campus). We were lucky to bring you [Penny] on board as our managing assistant. That was a very instrumental year for the journal. It was important for us to come up with a journal that would serve our own institutional needs and become *the* Canadian CES journal. While CES in Canada had strong regional offices and networks, there was no national scholarly journal devoted to community engagement scholarship. There was an empty niche, so to speak. I am sure you remember our preliminary mapping exercise when we dove into the world of academic publishing on community engagement worldwide, only to confirm that here in Canada we did not have a national peer-reviewed venue. Indeed, it was an inspiring realization as we continued looking beyond the local level, going higher, nationally and internationally.



Above: Members of Yellow Quill First Nation making sense of eDNA species identification for Nut Lake with Dr. Lori Bradford, Ph.D.
Photo credit: Anuja Thapa, May 2019

Penny: And Lori, does this reflect what's happening with the journal right now?

Lori Bradford: Yes, exactly. As many are aware, the journal is going through a transition where we are moving beyond some vulnerabilities of being hosted solely at the University of Saskatchewan and toward becoming a more sustainable entity. Though the journal's very essence is imbued with progressive social, cultural, and environmental ethics — something the world needs right now — we are suddenly faced with unexpected budget cuts. Just like during the journal's initiation, a working group stepped up who are now directing actions behind the scenes. We have been once again reaching out to engaged scholars and practitioners across the country to help us create a resilient publication venue that is open to all engaged scholars and can overcome social, cultural, health, economic, and environmental disruptions. Again, we are practicing meaningful engagement at a meta-level through listening and reiterating what we are hearing from academic, NGO, government, and local people involved in engaged scholarship and community-driven research.

We have been applauded for our thematic issues, guest-edited by globally-recognized experts and which explore marginalized groups' struggles, the successes of partnerships for change, and the trials that engaged scholars and their partners face amidst the constant flux of social and economic pressures. From academics, we hear that engaged scholars are being marginalized, despite being expert knowledge co-creators on overcoming marginalization. We've heard that we need to help solve current issues by first ensuring our own resilience so our authors' stories can continue to be told. At the moment, Saskatchewan-based academic faculty are helping as individuals to bridge this challenge. We've heard that we also need to work with larger potential partners to share the load and the benefits, approach donors whose hearts and spirits are aligned with the journal's mission, and explore international opportunities. Now that the journal has been active for five years publishing work from researchers worldwide, and given the speedy transition to internet-based modalities for all forms of scholarship as a result of the pandemic, I think we are ready for a global platform.

Natalia: We wanted to promote broadly-defined ideas of community-engaged research, not just with well-established ethnic communities, business communities, or NGOs, but also communities whose voice may be undermined. Oftentimes the under-represented communities are less able to speak for themselves, yet our journal published and publicized many collaborative projects with such communities. Women, immigrants, Black, Indigenous, people of colour and people with disabilities have contributed to *Engaged Scholar* over the years. When you applied to the managing editor position, Penny, I felt we were making good on our promise of heightening awareness of these groups because of your research positionality, expertise, advocacy and work among Filipino Indigenous cultures. Thank you so much for being part of the journal.



Above: Dr. Natalia Khanenko-Friesen, Ph.D. visiting with a project participant in her oral history project on the collapse of the collective farming system in Ukraine. May 2019, Village of Hlynske, Poltava Oblast, Ukraine.

Penny: You're welcome. Thank you also for getting me on board. Could you both share a little about how your training prepared you for this leadership role in ESJ?

Natalia: I'm trained as an anthropologist and as an ethnographer. And to me, schooling in ethnography and in the practice of fieldwork, which had embraced the idea of self-reflexivity before any other social sciences or humanities, was important. Anthropology has been a pioneering field that promoted self-reflexivity as an integral element of scholarly analysis

and writing. Anthropological training was instrumental in how I envisioned the journal. At some point in my career, I worked with illegal migrants from the former USSR in southern Europe, who were vulnerable people and had little desire to be seen or recognized. This work challenged my understanding of community-engaged scholarship. At least in the early period of their presence in the host country, the migrants were not self-organized into a community. Yet, they all strived for recognition and legitimization in their respective local contexts. In my privileged position as an outsider who was legally present in the country, I assumed the responsibility of communicating these aspirations to local establishments. Was it the work of a community-engaged scholar? On a conceptual level, I wanted to document through ethnographic case studies the flow and the experience of a million-sized outmigration from rural Ukraine that grew out of failed agricultural reform after the collapse of socialism. Simultaneously, in specific contexts of my research in Portugal, I had to advocate for the migrants without naming them or referring to their circumstances. In some other contexts in Canada, I have long been involved in the Ukrainian Canadian community and have supported this community by developing a strong academic program in Ukrainian studies. Is this not community-engaged scholarship? In other contexts, teaching my course on oral history, my students interviewed various Saskatchewan people to showcase their culture or highlight their needs. Would not that also be an example of community-engaged scholarship, where students learn to research real ethnographic settings with real constituencies and real people? These kinds of experiences taught me that community engagement can be done in a myriad of ways. Ultimately, showcasing diversity became an essential part of what we have been doing in the journal. We wanted to build the journal to accommodate different perspectives on community engagement and allow different understandings of it to be profiled through multidisciplinary lenses. In a way, I suspect that this particular positionality of mine as once an international student, now an anthropologist, and as a member of Canadian academia has impacted the journal while I served as its founding Editor. And I was fortunate to work with you, Penny, because you are also trained in fieldwork and anthropology, and we were on the same wavelength when it came to promoting ideas we felt were important for the journal. We both understood the value of going beyond the Canadian context to talk about engaged scholarship. That's why we saw the value in involving international members on our Editorial Board and in the Journal's work.

Lori: My academic career has been both planned and opportunistic, and I think that we experience both those pathways when we do engaged scholarship. I have worked for federal agencies and research institutes. I have degrees in biochemistry (with a minor in English), environmental studies, and social psychology, all of which have helped me speak some of the many academic languages on campus. My training was interdisciplinary, and it plays out in the research I do. For instance, on any given day, I can find myself translating how our molecular structures are affected by contaminants in water to Indigenous communities who have a limited voice in protecting their water sources outside of reserve boundaries

at the watershed management table. Or, studying statistics from survey work on values of transboundary water governance, or identifying indicators of mental health service performance in developing countries as a planetary boundary. The common threads in these lines of research are the need for better research translation for the public, ongoing engagement to advance societal change, and identifying patterns of marginalization across various societies including local, provincial, federal, Indigenous. I also think that my service contributions on campus through committees like Research, Scholarly, and Artistic Works have afforded me a network of colleagues providing incredible intellectual exchanges. From fine artists to toxicologists, nurses to hydrologists, and historians to economists and engineers, I've found myself most often collaborating with scholars who expertly scaffold sparkling moments of engagement, keeping us doing what we do. A final contribution to my commitment to engaged scholarship is that I have felt marginalized as an autistic woman and can deeply understand the need for sharing advancements in engagement and advocacy. My students are always surprised to find out that they are learning about social psychology, about empathy, from an autistic woman. The *Engaged Scholar Journal* demonstrates empathy in every issue, and I am honoured to curate that for our readers.

Penny: The journal is very diverse, and I think it's helpful to think about ourselves as empathizing with engaged scholars across the country. Especially now, with everything happening in Canada and the US.

Natalia: With the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2008, we in Canada have embarked on an important new journey towards new negotiations of what it means to be Canadians. And it's a different kind of pursuit than it was in the '70s and the '80s and the '90s. Today's social climate is very different from...the '70s and '80s when the policy of multiculturalism was adopted. The adoption of multiculturalism in 1971 was a welcome development for many in Canada. It promoted the idea of an inclusive society without privileging dominant cultures of the two former empires that 'settled' the territory of today's Canada. It may have been an improvement, but the multicultural model was still promoting the colonial perspective when it came to Indigenous peoples' roles in a nation-building project. We're now in a Truth and Reconciliation period, and we have a lot to reconsider concerning what is indeed the founding story of our nation. The Journal had become a part of a broader dialogue in Canada, engaging with Indigenous scholars and Indigenous perspectives on community-engagement meanings. Our first special issue on this topic is a pioneering publication of this kind and speaks to the distinctive character of the scholarship of community-engagement in Canada.

Penny: Yes, I could pick up a question from what you said about truth and reconciliation, the national policy, and how the journal can reflect this. We have an upcoming special issue on Trans-Systemic Indigenous Knowledge Systems that explores our roles as engaged scholars in Indigenous scholarship.

Lori: It's such an important special issue and one that is unlike any other work in Indigenous scholarship so far. This is one of the Journal's strengths, having its beginnings at the University of Saskatchewan. We have researchers here who are world leaders in reconciliation and Indigenous-engaged scholarship. We have community-driven research across a host of disciplines and interdisciplinary schools led by community-based researchers and community coordinators in urban and rural Indigenous communities. We regularly engage with Indigenous mentors-in-residence, artists-in-residence, and the Buffalo Circle members.

Penny: You're right, Lori. It is quite a privilege to feature the work of exceptional individuals both from the community and university in the Journal's regular and thematic issues. There are already 12 issues behind us. Looking back Natalia, other than publishing our first issue, what were the Journal's highlights in all these years?

Natalia: The important highlight is that we developed a very good, conceptually sustainable and robust journal production model. We are a multidisciplinary journal. We publish two issues per year, with one always being a special topics issue. This allowed us to get involved and collaborate with many outstanding teams of guest editors. This is where the capacity-building momentum has always been for us. We developed quite a network of partners, authors, reviewers and journal supporters. I loved that feeling of privilege that we, as an editorial team, have been sharing. We have been witnessing quite a flow of thoughts and ideas travelling back and forth between the authors and peer reviewers, all behind the curtain of the blind peer review. All these exchanges made our publications stronger, and this also brings a sense of satisfaction. I am very proud of how our team mobilized the Canadian thought-exchange on the pages of Canada's first and only peer-review journal on the scholarship of community engagement.

Penny: Where do you think we should go with the journal now, especially after hearing about the beginning and the highlights. What do you think should be next for us?

Natalia: Now that we have potent clusters of scholars and community-engaged workers across the nation, we could use a more formal association of community-engaged scholars. Can the Journal become a venue of a national network comprised of all such clusters and regional partnerships? It may not be simple because, first and above all, most of us are discipline-bound scholars, and we have to wear our institutional hats. Not everybody in community-engaged scholarship has a career in it. Some people are focused on CES as a part of their projects and cannot commit all their time due to their other institutional responsibilities. I'm not suggesting that we should arrive at a shared community engagement model like it has been done in the United States. There is the Engaged Scholarship Consortium in the US, which is the main venue through which people connect under the American version of community engagement. But in Canada, we have a different CES model, the

one predicated on diversity and informed by strong Indigenous engagement. It's hard to imagine that there might be an association based on such disciplinary diversity, but that's where our multidisciplinary journal on community engagement comes in. It can serve as the uniting tool for us to express ourselves as Canadian scholars of engagement. Maybe we want to have a shared platform through which we connect, and the journal can become the basis for such a national network or platform.

Another topic I would like to see explored more deeply and, I will credit you, Penny, with this idea as you came up with it, is the gender dimension to community-engaged work. I remember how you would suggest, "Let's do something about that. Look at this. We have so many women working in the field." There are gender-bound discursive differences, differences in focus, writing style, reflections, and overall pursuit. There are probably some interesting observations that we can make regarding or exploring the gender dimension of community engagement. This brings me back to the point I was just making: we need to nurture a national association of CES scholars. One way of going forward is to think beyond, maybe, tenure of this journal at the University of Saskatchewan. If you look across how Canadian academic journals or scholarly journals are published, they are normally associated with scholarly associations.

The Engaged Scholar journal has emerged outside of such a national network, and that's what I'm bringing into the conversation. If we built an association or network, then perhaps this network of various consortia, organizations, and offices across the nation could associate themselves with the journal in more than nominal terms. If it comes to the point that the U of S campus cannot sustain it, then maybe other campuses are ready to host the journal.

There's also fundraising. This is challenging. How could we fundraise for the journal? Who are the constituencies we can ask for money? In the board meeting back in May, we talked about that even if we go around and ask for a small enough amount of money from each faculty or each college at the University, it will be something to work with. Of course, our challenge is that we have limited resources, and we only have you, Penny, as a part-time appointment for a managerial position. And our editors have to balance the journal with other work — for example, in my particular case, I had to teach four courses, run a study-abroad program, do my research, perform admin services, and so on. So, we have this typical academic challenge to deal with while trying to think through how we can innovate.

Penny: Yes, I agree with all of that, Natalia. We've been a central piece of engaged scholarship in Canada, and when I'm reading our issues, I feel like, even though we're not in the same room, I'm surrounded by friends among the authors. If we were all together in a room, we would be great friends. Lori, Natalia has hinted at some things she would like explored in the journal and engaged scholarship across Canada. Where do you see the journal going next, and what do you think that means for engaged scholarship in Canada and beyond?

Lori: Natalia has such a great point that the journal is in a bit of a silo with not being based in a national or international organization but instead being geographically-bounded. Disruptions happen — disruptions to funding, to personnel, to us as academics, to practitioners and in communities, and to our family members. These disruptions are not predictable or, in some cases, preventable, but they can lead to innovation and regeneration. I feel like this transition between editors, and this reflection on where the journal should go, is a necessary disruption now that the journal has been publishing for five years.

When I think about engaged scholarship, I think of it as space where blending occurs; we blend philosophies like relativism and pragmatism; we blend disciplines, blend contexts, blend knowledge. We should reflect more on that blending because I think there are lessons within that realm to guide academia in the future. In funding agencies and the public and private sectors, there are movements for transformative, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary projects with requirements for equity, diversity, and inclusion strategies, Indigenous scholarship, and gender-based analyses.

The ESJ was presenting on those sorts of projects back in its first issue. I'm thinking of the work of Maureen Reed with Biosphere reserves and Susan Shantz reporting on *Project Charter: Call for Artisans, The Child Taken*, which provided art students in a senior interdisciplinary studio course with an opportunity to create works commemorating Residential Schools. After that, every issue highlighted similar projects, either in the *Essays* or the other parts of the journal. Yet, the work is not as widely known as it could be. Engaged scholars are well aware of our commitment to these issues, but we have experiences to share more widely, and there are steps the journal can take to spread the word. Natalia mentioned one: that is, sharing the editorial role across Canada temporally, geographically. Some other directions that bear discussion include more social media presence, expanding our readership by making ourselves known among national and international organizations, having a presence in more academic, government, NGO-based, or community events, and proposing co-sponsored issues with other journals. *Readers (Yes, I mean you!)*, I'm open to your ideas, too — so please feel free to send me an email.

There are also the obvious impacts that COVID-19 has had on all of us. As engaged scholars, we perhaps feel it more strongly due to the nature of our work, 'out there.' I also know that engaged scholars have insightful lessons for how to continue to engage despite the disruptions and boundaries. We have deepened our understandings of societal inequities and have become more devoted to evolving a more just society. I can't be geographically in the communities where I usually engage. Still, we are finding novel ways of continuing our work, and my role has become even more about coordinating and scaffolding opportunities for joint action. This challenge has brought about more creativity and insights from collaborators.

I'm also concerned about our wellness as engaged scholars. The emotional swings of the work we do bring joy, despair, pride, frustration, exciting intellectual exchanges, and overwhelming fatigue from advocacy. I want the journal to publish on how engaged scholarship affects our wellness. It may be time to take stock of how engaged scholars

take care of themselves and celebrate milestones. Having top paper and top student paper awards each year would be a small step we could implement to reward the heavy lifting we do in our work and our mentorship.

Penny: In an ideal world, we can imagine the journal's future. Now though, we need to consider the journal's future with how Canada also imagines its future during so many societal changes. I know that there are many streams and themes in imagining Canada as a future entity, right? But on your end, based on your positionality and in your context, what vision do you have for the journal?

Natalia: On a small scale, I would like to see more thematic special issues. I have become the director of a research institute that focuses on a particular culture in Canada, on Ukrainian studies (Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, U of Alberta, Ed.). I'm acutely aware of the dynamics of intercultural exchanges in Canada. I don't think we have had an issue that looked at ethnic groups and communities as partners in community-engaged research, but it could make a strong special issue.

Climate change would be of enormous importance for us to reflect on. There are important conversations taking place in community engagement, focusing on social justice and racism. So, we should be staying with the trends, but then how can we be flexible? We need to be planning ahead, but how can we respond to immediate needs and reflect on what is going on in society here and now? Are we having a conversation on how to do community engagement in pandemic times? We should create these opportunities for the journal.

For example, early on, we all came up with the idea of having a peer-reviewed section, and then we introduced a non-peer-reviewed section with reports from the field that meant to expedite publications and publish work in progress. And then we added the Exchanges section, which opens opportunities for discussions focused on here and now.

Lori: But there's room for sharing more widely. Publications along the lines of *The Conversation* have contributed to that niche in academia, but we can too, focused on engaged scholarship. Some journals do pre-prints that we can follow as they proceed through peer-review, and I'm considering whether that might work for us.

Natalia: Also we have been facing technical limitations. It would be helpful to put the journal on a platform that would allow us to maintain two streams: a peer-reviewed, rigorously documented, typical scholarly publications section, and a second section in a more dynamic, online platform, where we could have this very conversation posted as an audio file, recorded and uploaded within a few days. I think decoupling those two channels might be something to consider without necessarily tearing them apart. They should both still be considered part of the journal. But this open, non-peer-reviewed platform could allow more dynamic and more frequent engagement. Again, the question is where

to get the funds. We need to figure out how to support that. University leaders and their communication offices always want stories right now of what is going on. We can work with them and put our stories out.

Lori: Natalia, I wanted to thank you again for your leadership on campus and of the ESJ over the years. I think our readers will be equally grateful, and we hope to stay connected with you.

Natalia: Thank you, Lori. It's been a wonderful journey, filled with many discoveries, new partnerships and friendships. I am confident in the Journal's future as I am leaving it in skillful hands. It is a time for reflection and also regeneration for the journal. Welcome, Editor Lori Bradford, to the Engaged Scholar Journal.

About the Contributors

Lori Bradford is a white settler Canadian who identifies as a woman, a person with high functioning autism, and an interdisciplinary social scientist. She specializes in community-engaged and community-driven participatory research about water, health, and well-being in Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. She facilitates interdisciplinary training opportunities for students, co-creates evidence-based and culturally relevant policy recommendations and action plans, and translates research into best practices for enhancing biopsychosocial health. Email: lori.bradford@usask.ca

Natalia Khanenko-Friesen is a professor and Huculak Chair in Ukrainian Culture and Ethnography, Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies, and the Director of Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada. Her research interests include oral history, post-socialism in Europe and Ukraine, diasporic identities, labour migration, and Ukrainian Canadian culture. Her book projects include three co-edited collections of essays on oral history and two monographs — *Ukrainian Otherlands: Diaspora, Homeland and Folk Imagination in the 20th Century* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2015) and *The Other World or Ethnicity in Action: Canadian Ukrainianness at the end of the 20th century // Inshyj svit abo etnichist u dii: kanad'ska ukrainskist kintsia 20 stolittia* (Smoloskyp Press, 2011). Dr. Khanenko-Friesen served as the Director of the Prairie Centre for the Study of Ukrainian Heritage at the University of Saskatchewan and was a Founding Editor of the *Engaged Scholar Journal: Community-Engaged Research, Teaching and Learning*, Canada's leading academic journal on collaborative scholarship and community engagement. Email: nkhanenk@ualberta.ca

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