

Mobilizing Knowledge Through Partnerships

BRENDA L. SPENCER

University of Alberta

ALISON TAYLOR

University of Alberta

Introduction

IN 2004, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council—the major granting agency for university-based research in Canada—released a discussion paper called “From Granting Council to Knowledge Council,” to consider directions for change (SSHRC, 2004). The change agenda was related to concerns about the status of social science vis-à-vis natural sciences research; the requirements of the knowledge economy; and the rise of new public management and accountability practices. Through consultations with academics, community organizations, business leaders, and “other Canadians who care deeply about the future of research,” a new direction for SSHRC was established (SSHRC, 2005a, p. 3).

The shift to “knowledge council” emphasized research impact—a change from a focus on inputs to a greater focus on outputs (SSHRC, 2005a, p. 5). Toward this goal, SSHRC plans to support “larger, ongoing linkages and interactions through a mix of partnerships that span a diverse range of researchers, students, fields of activity, institutions, communities, regions, etc.” (SSHRC, 2005b, p. 14). The transformation of SSHRC in Canada is consistent with trends in other countries that aim to make research more relevant to policy and practice in the service of the perceived demands of the knowledge economy (Blackmore, 2002; Ozga, Seddon, & Popkewitz, 2006). Academic work is increasingly subject to regulation and audit regimes (Thomson, 2006) while agencies outside the research community seem to have a growing influence on the regulation and conduct of research (Ozga & Jones, 2006).

Approach to Inquiry

In this paper, we join a growing number of policy analysts who draw on the work of Michel Foucault (Ball, 1994; Dean, 1999; Miller & Rose, 1993; Olssen, Codd, & O’Neill, 2004; Peters

& Marshall, 1996; Popkewitz, 1998; Rose, 1999; Scheurich, 1994) to better understand the possibilities and limits of policy reform, and the implications of change whereby knowledge is produced and subjects are constituted as the effects of power (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998). In this vein, our interest in *effects* is not to see them as policy ‘outcomes’ and therefore to evaluate the degree to which they are *effective*. Rather, we see reform as “an event that articulates the productive nature of power rather than a solution to...[policy] problems...” (Popkewitz, 2000, p. 40). Our focus on effects is to reveal what we do and what we become when the rationalities of academic research shift and new technologies of partnership are introduced. Accordingly, our analysis is meant as a critique of reason (Peters, 1996); our aim is to see the SSHRC reform as an instance of the administration of change, and to examine the particularities of its historical and social construction (Popkewitz, 2000). In this vein, our examination of SSHRC’s new policies for research partnerships draws heavily on the concepts of governmentality.

Governmentality: According to Foucault (1991), within the state and its institutions, various forms of knowledge operate to shape, reinforce, and constitute a wide spectrum of taken-for-granted practices, arrangements, and structures that serve as the conduits—the techniques, apparatuses, and tactics—of power. With this conception of power/knowledge, *the* government or the policies of *the* state and its agencies are not understood to be, in and of themselves, the monolithic sources of power (i.e., as asserting power ‘over’) that they are often assumed to be. Rather, power in the Foucauldian sense is understood to operate in more diffuse and nuanced ways, through its discursive and productive character via language and texts—‘knowledge’ technologies—that are constructed by and constitute certain systems of reason and claims to truth. That is, government involves govern *mentality*.

Foucault (1991) argued that modern forms of political thought and action involve certain ways of thinking about *how* to govern—certain *mentalities* of rule (Gordon, 1991; Miller & Rose, 1993; O’Malley, 2001). Thus, in this sense, studies of government are studies of governmentality. They are analyses of rationalities, logistics, strategies, and processes of and for governing. Foucault (1991) contended that “the managing of a population not only concerns the collective mass of phenomena, the level of its aggregate effects, it also implies the management of population in its depths and its details” (p. 102). Arguing against essentialist notions of ‘the state,’ and countering political theory that, in his view, focused too much on institutions and not enough on practices, Foucault pointed to the ways in which power operates microphysically, as an inextricable feature of all dimensions of society, rather than as reducible or separable tendencies exercised at discrete micro or macro levels (Gordon, 1991).

Following Foucault and others who have contributed to a growing body of governmentality studies, we understand power/knowledge to be produced through and to (re)produce a broad field of political *rationalities*—the ‘means’ of government. Rationalities operate via an array of intellectual *technologies* (Dean, 1999; Miller & Rose 1993; Rose, 1999), including texts *and* their practices such as for defining, listing, numbering, and computing that “render a realm into discourse as a knowable, calculable and administrable object” (Miller & Rose, 1993, p. 79). It is through intellectual technologies, the forms and procedures of inscription—the means of ‘knowing’—that the “diverse domains of governmentality are made up, the ‘objects’ such as the economy, the enterprise, the social field and the family are rendered in a particular conceptual form and made amenable to intervention and regulation” (p. 79). In this way governmentality operates at a distance, through certain abstract rationalities, upon and by subjects who, as self-regulating and autonomous agents, are positioned, in relation to the operation of a network of concrete and material technologies, to be governed in a variety of ways. This ‘government at a

distance' works, as Miller and Rose suggest, within the present contexts of advanced liberalism, through the diffuse and nuanced microphysics of power—"the complex of relays and interdependencies which enable programmes of government to act upon and intervene upon those places, persons and populations which are their concern" (p. 82).

Data Sources and Analytic Strategies

In the next part of this paper, following Scheurich's (1994) reconceptualization of policy as a "critical problematic" (p. 297), we examine various documents that outline SSHRC's strategic plan for moving from a granting council to a knowledge council—texts that have been recently produced to introduce, promote, and offer direction as the agency changes its mandate. Specifically, we attempt to reveal some of the assumptions, conditions, and forces that have made possible the emergence of a certain problem for which new policies for research partnership are to offer a solution. This approach involves an analytics of governmentality (Bratich, 2003; Dean, 1999; Miller & Rose, 1993) concerned with "the different and particular contexts in which governing is called into question, in which actors and agents of all sorts must pose the question of how to govern" (Dean, 1999, p. 27). Governmentality, in this sense, is about *how* to conduct government and *how* to govern conduct. Foucault (1991) made this point by explaining that governmentality assumes "a problematic of government in general" (p. 88), which concerned the best way to manage populations while taking into consideration both the individual and the collective, "so as to secure the good of each and of all" (Rose, 1999, p. 23). Accordingly, an analytics of government requires that we ask the 'how' questions: How is it that this came to be said or that this is now being presented as a 'truth' by which we are to change our practices and reorganize our institutional spaces and arrangements?

In the section that follows this textual analysis, we refocus our analysis by asking similar questions, but with an emphasis on the *effects* of reform: What conditions has SSHRC's new direction for research produced? What possibilities are created, and what are the limits and constraints of the new policies governing partnerships? Here we draw attention to empirical data that reports on some of the effects of the SSHRC policy shift to research partnerships. Especially interested in effects as they concern subjects and subjectivity, we ask: How has the reform operated to reconfigure social relationships and to reshape understandings of selves and others?

Textual Analysis: Rationalities of Reform

The texts that introduce SSHRC's new policy direction begin with the identification of 'the problem': "Today, more than ever, Canada and the world needs advanced knowledge to deal with our most pressing social, political, economic and environmental problems" (SSHRC, 2005a, p. 23). Canada must be poised not only to compete, but also to assume a leadership role in the new knowledge economy. SSHRC's strategic plan for transforming itself into a knowledge council is based on the argument that, to date, not enough has been done to get "*humanities and social sciences knowledge out into the world* where it can make a difference, where it can inspire ideas and debate, where it can *galvanize individuals, communities, businesses and governments into action*" (p. 23, emphasis added). This problem is related to an outmoded research model that focused on investing money in a limited and limiting arena of research (i.e., academia). While

previous ad hoc arrangements for knowledge dissemination did not go far enough, new reporting requirements will work to ensure that academics produce knowledge that is “disseminatable” (Strathern, 2004, p. 552).

If the problem is the lack of accessible, policy-relevant research, the solution is knowledge produced through “true partnerships that cut across borders and disciplines and that bring researchers together with people working outside academia” (SSHRC, 2005a, p. 7). Specifically, this ‘knowledge council’ solution:

means bringing the knowledge gained from both basic and applied research to families, community groups, policy-makers, legislators, business leaders and the media. This means improving by several orders of magnitude the present scope and effectiveness of sharing that knowledge—by fostering more sophisticated regional, national and international research networks, by promoting more vigorous and sustained media attention and engagement in research issues, by promoting research as a vital and honoured part of every education” (p. 23)

Engagement with users or beneficiaries of research knowledge is assumed to be central to the design of applied research projects (SSHRC, 2005b).

In the articulation of impact, the notions of outcomes and outputs are closely linked and operate as key rationalities in a new ‘logic’ about how SSHRC is to govern and be governed. An implicit assumption is that knowledge production and utilization are relatively simple and linear processes (Blackmore, 2002). Clear direction for how research knowledge is to be disseminated, and to what end, is provided: “Research knowledge must be made public. It must inspire and inform real world debate, enrich intellectual and cultural life, and invigorate the economy” (SSHRC, 2005b, p. 7). Although abstract, the rationalities of impact serve as powerful organizers for how ‘knowledge’ is to be conceived and conducted as well as for research and knowledge dissemination. The discourse of knowledge production also includes the language of accountability: “Good stewardship of public funds and open transparent reporting is the foundation of SSHRC’s commitments to Canadians” (SSHRC, 2005b).

The new technologies for knowledge mobilization involve the promotion of “mutually beneficial, sustained relationships between academic researchers and local community organizations” (SSHRC, 2005b, p. 17). Strategies include “the development of new tools and methods...to encourage new alliances among researchers and to nurture actual and potential synergies across large interdisciplinary research teams working on related issues” (SSHRC, 2005b, p. 17). The discourse of *knowledge mobilization* includes “more routine access to new data and research findings” to “enable more evidence-based decision-making by governments and other sectors on key social, economic, cultural and other issues” (SSHRC, 2005b, p. 23).

SSHRC’s (2005a) plan for new programs and approaches for ‘mobilizing knowledge for greater impact’ involves a five-year process (2006 to 2011) to “retool and fine-tune” (p. 14) programs and to introduce new technologies for forming partnerships and alliances. For example, the Initiative on the New Economy (INE), Community-University Research Alliances (CURA), and Major Collaborative Research Initiatives (MCRI) programs all encourage working with community, business, and other partners in the design and conduct of research (SSHRC, 2004, p. 9). Specifically, SSHRC will:

- develop mechanisms to expand networks across the country that will support and promote Canada’s current and emerging research strengths.

- develop mechanisms, in partnership with external stakeholders, to identify and address critical gaps in research knowledge. (p. 17)

Among other things, the desired “pay-off” (SSHRC, 2005b, p. 23) of mobilizing knowledge for greater impact assumes:

- more scholars with strong and effective linkages with other researchers across Canada and the world, as well as with the broader range of stakeholders and partners outside academe;
- more stakeholders who are aware of, and actively benefit from, social sciences and humanities research expertise;
- the foundations of a knowledge mobilization system.

Partnerships in Practice: The local Microphysics of Power

A look at a specific SSHRC project indicates some of the contradictory effects of the discourse of partnerships for knowledge mobilization within the current regime of accountability. The Changing Nature of Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL) project was funded by SSHRC from 2002 through 2006 as a Collaborative Research Initiative on the New Economy (INE-CRI). The objectives of the INE program were to foster excellent research using innovative and multi-disciplinary approaches, develop research partnerships involving the public, private and not-for-profit sectors, and enable research results to inform decision-making in the public and private sectors. The work of the WALL network consisted of a national survey and 12 case studies involving researchers from seven universities, 10 co-investigators from community groups and professional institutions across Canada, and an international advisory committee.

In keeping with the emphasis in government on audit and accountability, and SSHRCs increased focus on research impact, the research grant of close to three million dollars was conditional on several reporting requirements. From the outset, all survey and case study researchers were required to produce “milestone reports” that outlined plans regarding targeted “deliverables and dates of delivery”—when the major research activities would be completed, how graduate students would be involved, and how results would be disseminated. Using these as a benchmark, researchers were then required to produce annual progress reports, prior to the release of funding, which recorded progress toward these goals and reasons for deviation from plans.

In the second year, continued WALL funding for all cases studies became contingent on a successful mid-term review by external assessors from SSHRC. This process included reporting on the progress achieved, reasons for not meeting targets, and dissemination activities and required academic project leaders to demonstrate the value of their projects. The final report asked researchers to summarize the significance of their research, to assess the impact of their work in a variety of areas (e.g., on public policy debate, teaching, and academic literature), and to summarize how and to whom findings have been disseminated. In turn, SSHRC was required to provide annual INE reports to the Ministers of Industry and Finance that detailed how research results were being used with/by relevant stakeholders (SSHRC, 2002).

The network’s culminating 2006 conference included a plenary session entitled “Rethinking partnerships and power” and panelists’ comments that reflected a gap between the assumptions

within SSHRC discourse about how partnerships work in the service of knowledge production and the lived experience of project leaders. SSHRC assumptions include the following:

- university-community relationships are a natural vehicle for knowledge exchange;
- partners provide resources (they do not require them);
- researchers are accountable primarily to funders, not partners;
- knowledge outcomes of partnership are more important than the process;
- partners play an equal role in relationships;
- the goals of partnership are mutually agreed on.

SSHRC (2005a, 2005b) promotes the idea of partnership as mutually beneficial sustained relationships between researchers and local community organizations. However, while noting that researchers have little professional incentive to engage in policy relevant work (and by extension, in partnerships), there is little discussion of what is required for effective partnership work. For example, although it may appear obvious, partners need relationship-building skills—the ability to collaborate and to be tolerant and empathetic (Fennessy, Billett, & Ovens, 2006). Sustaining effective partnerships requires relationships of trust, which take time to develop. This vision of partnership is in tension with systems of audit accountability, which tend to substitute measurement for trust (Shore & Wright, 2000). Finally, the notion of partnerships implies a valuing of collective rather than individual performance.

Within the WALL project, several researchers were adult educators who had experiential knowledge of community partnerships, and in some cases, were working within previously established relationships. Other researchers and their partners were less versed in the process of partnership, and relationships were established primarily for the purpose of the research project. These differences, while generally unacknowledged, had implications for what could be achieved within the timeframe of the grant in terms of building meaningful relationships. More generally, the question of whether relationships are long-standing or are constructed for the purposes of grant-getting makes a difference.

Further, the SSHRC discourse of partnership seems to assume that ‘good’ partners contribute to the research process by providing resources, thereby lightening the burden on government funders. The idea that partners may actually require resources is not considered. For example, the final report for SSHRC asked project leaders to list partners and to indicate the material value of their contributions to the research. However, project leader Eric Shragge (2006) suggests that the involvement of his “under-resourced” community partner was only possible if the organization was compensated for the time and space used for the project. While this is likely not the case with more economically powerful partners, it is often the case when ‘researching down.’

More generally, Shragge (2006) suggests that SSHRC technologies of research encourage relations that locate power and authority with the university partner vis-à-vis community groups in the following ways:

- The initial research application was reviewed by a panel of academics based on researchers’ scholarly presentation of the project and track records
- The initiator of research partnership is usually the university researcher
- The definition of what is legitimate knowledge rests in the university
- Most funding was allocated toward funding graduate students, compared, for example, to building research capacity within community organizations

- Funding goes to and is administered by the university, which receives overhead expenses. Transfer of funds to community organizations, on the other hand, is not common. (3)

Because the majority of funding came from SSHRC, academic researchers were ultimately accountable to this funder and to their own universities for their performance. For example, project leader Shauna Butterwick (2006) highlights how researchers were constantly reminded that partnerships were for the purpose of producing and mobilizing knowledge as follows:

Not surprisingly, WALL central was concerned with keeping track of its multiple strands, monitoring progress and communication with SSHRC. We experienced a small tornado during the third year of the project when funding was frozen until more detailed reports were written, submitted, and reviewed. Questions were raised about productivity and progress, clarifications were sought about the meaning of these terms, and many emails were sent. The winds did calm down and funding was restored but it was a sharp reminder of the power of WALL central and the dominant view of SSHRC in relation to outcomes and knowledge dissemination. (p. 5)

If partners were not providing material contributions, they did not have the same ability to influence the course of research, and the development of egalitarian and dialogic partnership became more difficult as researchers attempted to balance the needs of SSHRC and community partners. For example, Shragge's (2006) efforts to engage in a dialogic relationship with his community partner involved remaining flexible and adapting research plans to fit the partner's organization and practices. As a result the "rational research plans and results were not always forthcoming as expected by the management committee at WALL, creating some tension" (p. 6). In addition, meaningful engagement with his community group partner dictated "less emphasis on scholarly output and more on popular documents" (p. 6). His partnership's collectivist orientation to knowledge production did not fit neatly with SSHRC's emphasis on the accountability of individual researchers and on the implicit assumption that university researchers 'produce' research and partners 'consume' it.

These examples suggest that partnerships tend to be imagined within policy discourse in a very instrumental way. Ideal partners contribute material resources, are output oriented, and share the objectives of SSHRC funders in terms of knowledge mobilization. While we have seen that these assumptions are problematic for partners that are under-resourced community groups, they can also be problematic for researchers who are 'researching up.' For example, project leader Kathryn Church's (2006) research involved a partnership with a major banking institution to look at the learning/teaching strategies used by disabled employees to stay viable within a corporate environment. This relationship involved several moments of contestation and negotiation as the research team and corporation realized that their intentions for the study differed. For example, one critical incident involved the corporation drawing up a legally binding partnership agreement with the university to protect itself in cases where it would be referenced in research reports and related documents. Another occurred with the submission of the initial research report to the bank:

After a thorough reading, our manager cautioned against what she perceived as an undercurrent of negativity or critique that she picked up in our writing...She directed us to-

wards more “fairness” and “balance” in our portrait... We were to concentrate on “facts” as opposed to analysis or interpretation... (p. 3)

Similarly, the research team’s attempt to produce a newsletter for study participants was labour intensive and ultimately unsuccessful due to the corporation’s need to edit, censor, and correct. As Church (2006) explains, “nothing that we deemed important matched their frame of reference” (p. 4). She concludes that knowledge—in both corporate textual practices and conventional academic textual practices—was constituted as problem-centred and linear. In this partnership, the bank exercised control over the research process to the extent that it was unclear if researchers would be able to successfully publish the material produced through the study. The response of the researchers was to produce “Trojan texts” (p. 6) for discussion and debate within the corporate national office.

The experiences of partnership discussed above suggest the key role of SSHRC, as funder, in constructing research partnerships as instrumental, output focused relationships. Therefore, when *researching down*, academics are constructed as experts in a “local colonial” relation with community (Halperin, as cited in Shragge, 2006), while academics that are *researching up* run the risk of research partners as well as funding agencies attempting to shape, normalize, and instrumentalize their conduct in order to achieve desired objectives (Miller & Rose, 1993).

The various technologies for accountability and audit locate responsibility for and the fulfillment of the proper performances of partnership at the level of the localized research project. This situation helps to explain the general frustration felt by researchers involved in a range of partnership. Researchers who sought to develop genuinely cooperative forms of mutual engagement with community organizations (Tett, Crowther, & O’Hara, 2003) ran the risk of being disciplined by funders for their lack of attention to appropriate outputs. Critical researchers working with more powerful partners ran the risk of being disciplined by both funders and partners in the dissemination process. In both cases, the process of knowledge production and mobilization was tightly constrained. The “easiest” partnerships for researchers were those where involvement by partners was peripheral or superficial; however, the discourse of engaging partners in knowledge mobilization also constructed these researchers as deficient.

The preceding discussion suggests that the term ‘partnership’ has taken on particular meanings within the SSHRC strategy to facilitate knowledge exchange and dissemination between researchers and others. Possibilities for the co-production of knowledge within democratic partnerships are constrained by limiting assumptions about the role of partners, individualized accountability, a narrow and linear view of how knowledge is produced and disseminated, and a privileging of outcomes over process.

Discussion

The texts related to the SSHRC reform for shifting from a granting council to a knowledge council are clear and convincing. They articulate a problem-solution logic wherein the rationality of knowledge mobilization for research impact serves not only as a powerful argument but also as a compelling power/knowledge construction (Foucault, 1990, 1995). The discourse of “true partnerships” (SSHRC, 2005a, p. 7) and its various expressions (i.e., linkages, interactions, border- and discipline-crossing teams, networks, collaborations, synergies, mutually beneficial relationships, alliances) introduces a kind of populist language that appeals to norms and values

and a claim to truth that is both compelling and seductive (Miller & Rose, 1993). Coupled with the discourse about knowledge building of a kind that is to be most effective (i.e., can galvanize action for impact through knowledge dissemination), the discourse of partnership offers promise, a means to a desirable outcome that is to be shared and utilized by all “to inspire and inform real world debate, enrich intellectual and cultural life, and invigorate the economy” (SSHRC, 2005b, p. 7). Moreover, impact and effectiveness are to be ensured through various mechanisms for accountability and audit, such as detailed plans of action and activities, the production and use of evidence and benchmark data, regular and meticulous reports of progress and performance, comprehensive records of short and long term outcomes, and reviews by SSHRC—devices made all the more potent through ties to funding.

Key technologies of intervention for a kind of government at a distance, the SSHRC policy texts become a means by which authorities, including and often especially research partners, influence the conduct of others to achieve desired objectives. This is seen in the ways that researchers tended to view accountability requirements in terms of “WALL central” rather than of SSHRC. As Butterwick (2006) suggests, the sub-projects at all points of the extensive WALL web are shaped and sustained through the textual practices for accountability and audit that are generated at the centre and reproduced in the administrative arrangements and processes of the various sub-projects. Hence, forms of information, particular to accounting for outputs and funding, flow from the centre to peripheral sites and back (and are ultimately forwarded to and reviewed by SSHRC), to regulate research conditions, practices, and decisions in ways that align with the broader SSHRC partnership policy. In effect, through these arrangements and practices, the goals of SSHRC become the ‘official’ goals of all WALL projects, and the motivations and intentions that may have governed the processes and products of previously existing research partnerships are eclipsed or, at least, subordinated by what ‘counts’ in the new partnership regime.

The SSHRC reform texts not only introduce new forms, arrangements, and performances of research but also constitute new ways of being a researcher/partner. Understandings of self and of others shift in ways that accord with the specific terms of partnership prescribed by the SSHRC policy. New subjectivities become particularly appealing when partnership is articulated and ultimately realized through conditions and effects that are seen to be positive and beneficial. Indeed, as Shragge (2006) points out in his account of the WALL project for which he was the project leader, partnership initiatives, in many respects, can offer opportunities for those in community organizations to build research skills, deepen social and political analysis, receive financial support, and build local credibility. At the same time, they can offer university researchers opportunities to gain access to research sites and participants, to develop community awareness and local knowledge, and to enhance research legitimacy beyond academic settings. These possible benefits are in line with what is asserted and assumed in the SSHRC policy documents. However, as Shragge (2006) and other WALL researchers also report, new research partnerships are not always characterized by uncomplicated relationships and by equality and reciprocity. In this regard, they are constructed as especially difficult in relation to SSHRC conceptions of partnerships, which articulate only the positive effects and implications of such collaborations. For example, the WALL case reveals significant issues related to researching both ‘up’ and ‘down.’ Where on one hand such issues were seen by WALL researchers as analytic events for an important examination of the operation of power, on the other hand, such issues are easily rendered within SSHRC discourse as more of a ‘problem’ than a ‘critical problematic.’ When the terms of reference for research partnerships focus on benefits articulated

as outputs and impacts, the range of potential partnerships runs the risk of being narrowed to those ‘appropriate’—conducive to seamless processes and desirable outcomes—rather than those that, while perhaps not easy, are potentially most important. The terms for being a ‘good’ researcher with a ‘proper’ partnership shift as SSHRC is transformed.

As can be seen in the above consideration of the SSHRC policy, texts are not neutral documents; they function not only to lever action, but also as power/knowledge frameworks, within which we are able (or not) to think about research and partnerships and to understand or to ‘know’ our work, ourselves, and others. Here, textually mediated effects are important to note. Butterwick’s (2006) ‘web’ analogy, in addition to providing an appropriate description of the interrelated connections among the various research partners of the WALL network, also offers a point of analysis that helps us to understand how power operates at the local level, microphysically, in the governmental practices of the new partnership initiatives. Indeed, it could be argued that this effect is the aim: In theory, at least, power and resources *are* to be diffused among various sites and individuals in a web-like network such that SSHRC’s plan can be taken up and implemented and its purposes and goals for impact realized.

However, as was the case with the WALL sub-projects, different cultures, priorities, and understandings among the various partners made such objectives difficult to achieve. The policy assumes that where there is a desire for a partnership, one can exist. In practice though, the strategies and mechanisms for ‘how to do’ partnerships are limited to functions of administration and accountability, and partnership ‘success’ is predicated on what can be made visible and calculable in terms of outputs and impact. No attention is given to how partnerships can be or ought to be initiated, nurtured, and sustained in other ways that could be meaningful or helpful to all involved. The focus on *product* and the lack of attention paid to *process* fails to acknowledge the inter- and intra- group associations and interactions of different partner groups and does not recognize the complex nature of preexisting relations of power and of the politics involved in introducing new forms and processes of research. As Shragge (2006) noted, for example, the focus on accountability and outputs cannot but position the university researcher as the expert ‘in charge’ of a process that is outputs- and impact-governed through the university channels of WALL rather than through the initiatives and locale of the community partner. In this way, to a significant degree, control over what counts for funding drives the agenda and constrains possibilities of dialogic decision-making and reciprocal processes for mutual benefit.

The project leaders, obliged to perform within the administrative constraints of the larger WALL project, where the accountability for research generated is tied to funding and constructed for external purposes, are compelled by an instrumentalist economic-bureaucratic accountability to WALL central and to SSHRC rather than by a professional-ethical accountability to partner groups or communities (Blackmore, 1988). Under such conditions, research partnerships tend to be uneven at best and, at worst, are merely partnerships in name, where arranged relationships are artificially produced and operated for the sake of ends rather than means (Miller & O’Leary, 1994).

Concluding Remarks

Where what constitutes a ‘fruitful’ relationship—a partnership that is not only defined and regulated by policy but is to produce what is deemed ‘impactful’ knowledge (i.e., effectively disseminated and ‘useful’ evidence)—establishes the conditions of research, the processes and

practices of the work becomes defined and limited by these *a priori* terms. The effect of this is a heightening of the degree to which what counts as research is what gets done (Amit, 2000; Church, 2006; Shore & Wright, 2000; Shragge, 2006). While possibilities exist within the parameters of the policy, the new textual practices normalize the new ways to do research and to be a researcher and also serve, increasingly, to make impossible and therefore unimaginable, alternative research, arrangements, and subjectivities. This case is especially so when funding is contingent upon the new research partnerships, and even more the case when the partnership relationships and research practices are regulated and monitored in a way very particular to administrative, accountability, and audit technologies.

As Shragge (2006) argues, it is important to see the SSHRC partnership initiatives as reflective “of a wider rediscovery of community by government in the context of a neo-liberal transformation” (p. 2) where a ‘crisis of legitimation’ has resulted in the far-reaching restructuring and weakening of the state and its various public institutions and sectors (Codd, Harker, & Nash, 1990; Lash & Urry, 1987; Offe, 1984) such that, increasingly, community groups have responded, new not-for-profit agencies and NGOs have emerged, quango² organizations have been established, and private concerns have stepped in to assume roles and functions that were previously the purview of the state (Dean, 1999; Rose, 1999). In this regard, SSHRC’s research partnerships can be understood as an effect of neoliberal reform as well as a response to the pressures of the globalized knowledge economy (Morrow & Torres, 2000; Seddon, Billett, & Clemans, 2004). As Shragge (2006) contends, “research, directed by state funded programs and administered through the university is yet another way that community organizations are pushed into less ‘political’ roles and away from being advocates for social and economic justice” (p. 2). This situation is especially so when the funding, accountability, and audit are closely tied in a system of performativity that focuses on outputs and impact (Ball, 2001; Lingard, 2000; Ranson, 2003; Rose, 1996).

While we do not suggest that the new SSHRC reform can be understood only in light of neo-liberal or knowledge economy discourses, we argue that the reports of the WALL partnerships do point to the ways in which current social policy trends have blended economic/instrumentalist and social democratic values (Ball, 1999). And, although equity and social justice aims are not entirely forgotten, especially by those implementing policies at the local level, they have become “‘framed and reframed’...[as] competing discourses are ‘stitched together’ in the new policies” (Taylor & Rizvi, 1997, p. 9). In this way, the concept of partnerships takes on new meaning and is enacted in new ways that are arguably more about a kind of performance—perhaps even a kind of contrived relationship or a ‘fabrication’ (Ball, 2001)—than they are about social democratic aims or about a genuine commitment to egalitarian change (Lingard, 2000). Thus, we hope that this paper offers some points for further consideration and debate to those entering new research partnerships. Our findings point to the benefits of such arrangements but, through an analysis of the textual forms and the local, microphysical technologies and relations of power, also pose some cautions about what is possible or not to think and to do, and what is most valued when our work becomes framed by new policies for research partnerships. We hope that we have offered some points to think about what might be justified in the name of knowledge production and mobilization, and to provide opportunities to reconsider and rework the discourses that describe partnerships and that regulate and potentially normalize the ways in which we are able or not to do research.

About the Authors

Brenda L. Spencer is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. Her current research draws on critical theories of power and the state and cultural geography to examine the practices of accountability policy.

Alison Taylor is a Professor and Director of the Work and Learning Network at the University of Alberta. Her current research focuses on school-to-work transition for youth.

NOTES

1. In contrast, Ozga (2004) suggests that research findings are usually difficult to transfer to practice since they tend to be context-specific, open to different interpretations, and/or contradictory to policy directions.
2. As characteristic of what he describes as contemporary forms of ‘advanced’ liberalism, Rose (1996) points to the ‘quangoization’ of the state to argue that quasi-autonomous, non-governmental organizations have proliferated, taking on regulatory functions through various technologies (e.g., performative modes of accountability) that emphasize the objectivity and neutrality of numbers to make claims to an apolitical agenda.

REFERENCES

- Amit, V. (2000). The university as panopticon: Moral claims and attacks on academic freedom. In M. Strathern (Ed.), *Audit cultures: Anthropological studies in accountability, ethics and the academy*. (pp. 215–235). London: Routledge.
- Ball, S. J. (1994). *Education reform: A critical post-structural approach*. Buckingham, England: Open University Press.
- Ball, S. J. (1999). Labour, learning and the economy: A ‘policy sociology’ perspective. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 29(2), 195–206.
- Ball, S. J. (2001). Performativities and fabrication in the education economy: Towards the performative society. In D. Gleeson & C. Husbands (Eds.), *The performing school: Managing teaching and learning in a performance culture*. (pp. 210–226). London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Blackmore, J. (1988). *Assessment and accountability*. Geelong, Australia: Deakin University Press.
- Blackmore, J. (2002). Is it only ‘what works’ that ‘counts’ in new knowledge economies? Evidence-based practice, educational research and teacher education in Australia. *Social Policy and Society*, 1(3), 257–266.
- Bratich, J. Z. (2003). Making politics reasonable: Conspiracism, subjectification, and governing through styles of thought. In J. A. Bratich, J. Packer, & C. McCarthy (Eds.), *Foucault, cultural studies, and governmentality* (pp. 67–100). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Butterwick, S. (2006). Spider webs and wind storms: Reflections on a community-academic research partnership. *Rethinking work and learning: Research findings and policy challenges* (Plenary and workshop proceedings). Toronto: OISE/UT.
- Church, K. (2006). Learning the rules of engagement: Textual practices of power in a university-corporate partnership. *Rethinking work and learning: Research findings and policy challenges* (Plenary and workshop proceedings). Toronto: OISE/UT.

- Codd, J., Harker, R., & Nash, R. (1990). Education, politics and the economic crisis. In J. Codd, R. Harker, & R. Nash (Eds.), *Political issues in New Zealand education* (2nd ed.) (pp. 7–21). Palmerston North, New Zealand: The Dunmore Press.
- Dean, M. (1999). *Governmentality: Power and rule in modern society*. London: Sage Publications.
- Fennessy, K., Billett, S., & Ovens, C. (2006). Learning in and through social partnerships. *Australian Journal of Adult Education*, 46(1), 9–27.
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality volume 1: An introduction*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1991). Governmentality. In G. Burchell, C. Gordon, & P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality* (pp. 87–104). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Gordon, C. (1991). Governmental rationality: An introduction. In G. Burchell, C. Gordon, & P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality* (pp. 1–51). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lash, S., & Urry, J. (1987). *The end of organized capitalism*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Lingard, B. (2000). It is and it isn't: Vernacular globalization, educational policy, and restructuring. In N. C. Burbules & C. A. Torres (Eds.), *Globalization and education: Critical perspectives* (pp. 79–108). New York: Routledge.
- Miller, P., & O'Leary, T. (1994). Governing the calculable person. In A. G. Hopwood & P. Miller (Eds.), *Accounting as social and institutional practice* (pp. 98–115). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Miller, P., & Rose, N. (1993). Governing economic life. In M. Gane & T. Johnson (Eds.), *Foucault's new domains* (pp. 75–105). London: Routledge.
- Morrow, R. A., & Torres, C. A. (2000). The state, globalization, and educational policy. In N. C. Burbules & C. A. Torres (Eds.), *Globalization and education: Critical perspectives* (pp. 27–56). New York: Routledge.
- Offe, C. (1984). *Contradictions of the welfare state*. London: Hutchinson.
- Olssen, M., Codd, J., & O'Neill, A. (2004). *Education policy: Globalization, citizenship and democracy*. London: Sage Publications.
- O'Malley, P. (2001). Genealogy, systematisation and resistance in “advanced liberalism.” In G. Wickham & G. Pavlich (Eds.), *Rethinking law, society and governance: Foucault's bequest* (pp. 13–25). Oxford: Hart Publishing.
- Ozga, J., Seddon, T., and Popkewitz, T. (2006). Introduction. In J. Ozga, T. Seddon, and T. Popkewitz (Eds.), *Education research and policy: Steering the knowledge-based economy*. World Yearbook of Education 2006 (pp. 1–14). New York: Routledge.
- Ozga, J. & Jones, R. (2006). Travelling and embedded policy: The case of knowledge transfer. *Journal of Education Policy*, 21(1), 1–17.
- Peters, M. (1996). *Poststructuralism, politics and education*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Peters, M., & Marshall, J. (1996). *Individualism and community: Education and social policy in the postmodern condition*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Popkewitz, T. S. (1998). *Struggling for the soul: The politics of schooling and the construction of the teacher*. New York: Teachers College Press.

- Popkewitz, T. S. (2000). Reform. In D. A. Gabbard (Ed.), *Knowledge and power in the global economy: Politics and the rhetoric of school reform* (pp. 33–42). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Popkewitz, T. S., & Brennan, M. (1998). Restructuring of social and political theory in education: Foucault and a social epistemology of school practices. In T. S. Popkewitz & M. Brennan (Eds.), *Foucault's challenge: Discourse, knowledge, and power in education* (pp. 3–35). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ranson, S. (2003). Public accountability in the age of neo-liberal governance. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(5), 459–480.
- Rose, N. (1996). Governing “advanced” liberal democracies. In A. Barry, T. Osborne, & N. Rose (Eds.), *Foucault and political reason: Liberalism, neo-liberalism and rationalities of Government* (pp. 37–64). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Rose, N. (1999). *Powers of freedom: Reframing political thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scheurich, J. J. (1994). Policy archeology: A new policy studies methodology. *Journal of Education Policy*, 9(4), 297–316.
- Seddon, T., Billett, S., & Clemans, A. (2004). Politics of social partnerships: A framework for theorizing. *Journal of Education Policy*, 19(2), 123–142.
- Shore, C., & Wright, S. (2000). Coercive accountability: The rise of audit culture in higher education. In M. Strathern (Ed.), *Audit cultures: Anthropological studies in accountability, ethics and the academy* (pp. 57–89). London: Routledge.
- Shragge, E. (2006). Community university research partnerships: A critical reflection and an alternative experience. *Rethinking work and learning: Research findings and policy challenges* (Plenary and workshop proceedings). Toronto: OISE/UT.
- SSHRC. (April, 2002). *A strategy for INE knowledge transfer*, prepared for INE Advisory Committee by SSHRC Knowledge Products and Mobilisation Division. Ottawa: SSHRC.
- SSHRC. (2004). From granting council to knowledge council: Renewing the Social Sciences and Humanities in Canada. Consultation framework on SSHRC's transformation. Ottawa: SSHRC.
- SSHRC. (2005a, July). *Knowledge Council: SSHRC Strategic Plan, 2006-2011*. Ottawa: SSHRC.
- SSHRC. (2005b, January). *From granting council to knowledge council: Renewing the social sciences and humanities in Canada*. Report on the consultations. Ottawa: SSHRC.
- Strathern, M. (2004). Laudible aims and problematic consequences, or: the ‘flow’ of knowledge is not neutral. *Economy and Society*, 33(4), 550–561.
- Taylor, S., & Rizvi, F. (1997). *Educational policy and the politics of change*. London: Routledge.
- Tett, L., Crowther, J. and O'Hara, P. (2003). Collaborative partnerships in community education. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(1), 37–51.
- Thomson, P. (2006). Policy scholarship against de-politicisation. In J. Ozga, T. Seddon, and T. Popkewitz (Eds.), *Education research and policy: Steering the knowledge-based economy*. World Yearbook of Education 2006 (pp. 316–331). New York: Routledge.

