

Research as Activism: Bridging Knowledge and Action for Transformational Change

Ardavan Eizadirad*^a, Emin Kilinc^a, Jennifer Straub^a


* Corresponding author:
Email: aeizadirad@wlu.ca
a. Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada

Article Info

Received: December 05, 2023

Accepted: September 10, 2024

Published: September 11, 2024

 10.46303/jcve.2024.34

How to cite

Eizadirad, A., Kilinc, E., & Straub, J. (2024). Research as Activism: Bridging Knowledge and Action for Transformational Change. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 7(3), i-iv.

<https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2024.34>

Copyright license

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license.

ABSTRACT

Research as Activism is the fusion of scholarly inquiry with intentional advocacy and action. It transcends academic exploration by actively challenging systemic inequities and injustices, engaging marginalized communities, and driving tangible social change (hooks, 2003). Research as activism embodies a commitment to using research methodologies, epistemologies, personalized and institutional privilege, and accessible dissemination to dismantle oppressive structures, promote justice, and empower and centre voices often unheard, dismissed, silenced, or marginalized in traditional academic discourse or in community spaces (Eizadirad et al., 2023; Battiste, 2013; Simpson, 2017). As Audre Lorde (1984) emphasizes, “There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives” (p. 138).

KEYWORDS

Research; activism; advocacy; social justice; intentional

INTRODUCTION

In a world ripe with complex challenges and a range of injustices, we as co-editors curated this special issue with intentionality to spotlight and centre research that transcends academia, bridging knowledge and action for transformation change and tangible outcomes. As part of curating this special issue on the theme of research as activism, we started with a callout for articles guided by a series of questions to capture case studies and examples of activism and its impact. We also wanted to highlight the challenges and barriers in using research as a tool in advancing social justice and equity for the benefit of thriving communities. Similarly, as readers, we encourage you to think about your own identities and communities you belong to, reflect on the questions, and interconnect it to how you can commit to action by merging theory with activism for tangible outcomes. Questions to consider include:

- How can research redefine traditional academic boundaries to drive social change?
- What methodologies or frameworks integrate activism effectively into research?
- How can research engage with marginalized or underrepresented communities?
- What concrete actions, case studies, or outcomes have emerged from research as a form of activism?
- How does your work and research address systemic issues or structural inequities?
- In what ways does your work and research challenge existing power dynamics and promote equity and justice?
- What ethical considerations guide research as activism?
- What are the tensions and complexities between scholarly rigor and activist engagement?
- How does activism research contribute to ongoing dialogues and movements for social transformation?
- What lessons can others learn from weaving and blending research with activism?

This special issue is a good starting point for academics, educators, administrators, practitioners, graduate students, new and emerging scholars, non-profits, non-governmental organizations, and others who are passionate to see institutions and societies improve and do better through advocacy, awareness, and activism. Activism is not a one-off event, but often a springboard or a seed, that takes time to cultivate and blossom. It takes a collective, shared responsibility to bring it to fruition as a community.

In the last decades, there has been a growing recognition of the transformative power of research when aligned with activism to lead for social change, equity, and greater justice in education (Ahmed, 2021; Fanon, 1961; Freire, 1970; Jones, 2017; Lorde, 1984; hooks, 2003) This special issue consists of eleven articles from scholar-activists with unique positionalities across all walks of life. In the realm of remembering lost lives and collective healing from trauma, the article "Homicides, Incarceration, and Pain-Driven Advocacy in the Jane and Finch

Community" delves into the advocacy journey of community members dealing with violence and systemic neglect. Addressing the educational and activist narratives of marginalized groups, "Reclaiming Narratives - Muslim Women Navigating Activism in Educational Research" examines the challenges and resistance faced by visibly identified Muslim women in academia. The urgent issue of youth homelessness is tackled in "Transforming Canadian Policy Agenda for School-Based Prevention of Youth Homelessness," which proposes a multi-faceted activist approach to policy and education. The intersection of arts and scholarly inquiry is highlighted in "Inquiry for Social Transformation: Black Mother Scholars Redefining Scholarly Inquiry Through Black Artistic Expression," which showcases how Black artistic practices can reframe educational research. In "Outreach as Research Activism: Using STEM Outreach as a Bridge to Social Change," the impact of STEM outreach on pre-service teachers' understanding of activism is explored. The application of disability justice principles in academic research is critically examined in "Using Duoethnography to Connect the Disability Justice Principles to Education Research About Disabled Populations on Campus." The article "The Stories of Us: Queer Tamils and Their Experiences Reclaiming Culture and Heritage in Canada" provides an ethnographic study of Queer Tamil Canadians reclaiming their cultural heritage. "World, Do You Hear Me? Reimagining Black boys' Voice in Early Childhood Education" challenges the traditional narratives about Black boys in education, advocating for their voices to be foregrounded. The complexities of Indigenization in higher education policies are scrutinized in "Institutional Logics of Indigenization in Canadian Higher Education: The Role of Critical Policy Analysis as a Research Tool Activating Social Change." Furthermore, "At the Cost of Momentum" discusses the tension between truth and activism, proposing educational interventions that foster critical thinking. The practical application of cultural competence in fostering inclusivity is detailed in "Building Bridges: Catalyzing Institutional Change at Utah State University via Experiential Learning with Ute and Navajo Students." Together, these articles offer rich insights and actionable strategies for integrating activism into research and education, aiming to create a more equitable and just society. As a collective, they delve into the intersection of research and activism across different settings and socio-political contexts. They explore, outline, and emphasize how scholarly inquiry can drive societal change, with its nuances and challenges, to advance equitable outcomes and social justice. Sometimes this is in the form of micro improvements, which as a domino effect, contributes to larger structural and systemic changes over time.

Although we are writing about social issues, through the medium of a journal, let us not forget that in many cases people have sacrificed their lives as a commitment to activism and speaking out against injustice. This carries with it intergenerational impacts and traumas and a responsibility to continue the work. Part of sharing and documenting these efforts is honoring elders, ancestors, and activists who came before us and did their part to improve societies and local communities. Yes, we need to do better, but let us also keep in mind that we have come a long way and must keep the momentum going. It starts with us and requires a community effort.

As Mahatma Gandhi reminds us, “You never know what results come out of your actions, but if you do nothing, there will be no results.” (Goodreads, 2024, para. 1).

Systemic oppression is complex to dismantle as it requires addressing multiple root causes that are complex. Therefore, let us avoid the myth of a single solution where people often argue extensively that one way is the right way or the only way to resolve matters. What we need is more dialogue, intentional strategizing, and multiple action plans to tackle the roots of oppression in education and across other institutions. We must also not be afraid to make mistakes recognizing the journey is often filled with trial and error and imperfections. Having different methodologies that explore similar social issues from various perspectives speaks to the importance of honoring and respecting different voices and communities and their unique needs.

Thanks to all the contributors, reviewers, and journal administrators for being vulnerable as a form of strength and willing to share your journey including struggles and triumphs to inspire and empower people and institutions to be better in transformative ways. We also want to thank the readers for wanting to learn more about research as activism in the hope that the articles inspire, motivate, empower, and strengthen you to commit to action and continue to dream big and hope for a better future with endless new possibilities. As co-editors, we are building on this special issue by putting together a co-edited book which will be published in 2026 with Palgrave Macmillan titled “Research as Activism in Education: Community-Oriented Perspectives”.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. (2021). *Complaint!* Duke University Press.
- Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit*. UBC Press.
- Eizadirad, A., Abawi, Z., & Campbell, A. (2023). *Enacting anti-racism and activist pedagogies in teacher education: Canadian perspectives*. Canadian Scholars Press.
- Fanon, F. (1961). *The wretched of the earth*. Grove/Atlantic, Inc.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
- Goodreads, (2024). *Mahatma Gandhi > quotes > quotable quote*.
<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/3343-you-may-never-know-what-results-come-of-your-actions>
- Jones, D. (2017). From theorizing in the ivory tower to creating change with the people: Activist research as a framework for collaborative action. *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology (IJAVET)*, 8(2), 29-41.
 DOI: 10.4018/IJAVET.2017040103
- hooks, B. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. Routledge.
- Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. Crossing Press Berkeley.
- Simpson, L. B. (2017). *As we have always done: Indigenous freedom through radical resistance*. University of Minnesota Press.