

## **Pluralities of engagement: Negotiating difference in the ‘research literacies’ of academics and practitioners through the development of a new journal of public engagement**

Researchers and funders in the UK are increasingly recognizing the links between user engagement with research processes/outputs and the impact of research for policy and practice (HEFCE et al 2011, Facer et al 2012). As well as improving the social accountability of academic research and its relevance to the work of research brokers and end users, collaborative processes of co-production (such as those identified and developed through initiatives like the Arts and Humanities Research Council’s Connected Communities programme and the work of the RCUK-funded National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement) also serve to recognize and integrate a plurality of knowledges with implications for genuine contributions to academia. While this provides an invigorating challenge to the traditional dichotomy between academic and practitioner knowledges (e.g. the distinction between Mode 1 & 2 knowledges pioneered by Gibbons et al 1994) there are also a number of challenges associated with collaborative research. Not least of these is the diversity of ‘research literacies’ that different academics and practitioners bring to collaborations as well as the challenge of communicating across disciplines and sector-based jargon and frameworks that applied research often necessitates (Pettit et al 2009). Linked to this, is the ‘affordances’ of the different types of research text through which co-produced knowledge is communicated (e.g. dissertations, reports, journal articles and conference presentations) which frame and represent knowledge in different ways – privileging some over others (Fransman 2014). And finally, the different institutional structures, processes and agendas within and outside of Higher Education also serve to distribute these literacies across ‘hierarchies of knowledge’ with implications for the politics of participation in research collaborations (e.g. Pain et al 2010).

Within the field of Higher Education Studies, two areas of research have started to engage with these challenges and opportunities. First, research into academic literacies (e.g. Lea and Stierer 2011; Rai and Lillis 2011) has built on the work of the New Literacy Studies to explore the ways in which knowledges, literacies, texts and institutional discourses collide. Second, the ‘Open Scholarship’ movement (e.g. Weller 2011; Andrews et al 2012; Goodfellow and Lea 2013) has examined the role of digital resources in democratizing and enhancing access to new knowledges. These studies unearth significant implications for new requirements of researcher education, identifying some of the new ‘engagement literacies’ that might enhance participation in processes of co-production as well as the institutional enabling environments needed to support this.

It is within this context that a new international journal of public engagement (*Research for All: Higher Education and Society*) is in the process of being developed as a collaboration between the Institute of Education (IOE) and the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE). The journal seeks to provide a space for academics, support staff and managers within Higher Education and non-academic practitioners across a range of sectors to explore diverse processes of research engagement and the associated challenges. As with any process of co-production, the journal development has met with a series of challenges related to the different interests and motivations of potential contributors, the genre and material constraints and potential of the journal-as-text (framed by the requirements and structures/processes of the Higher Education and academic publishing sectors) and the

diverse literacies of contributors. In a bid to unpack these challenges and develop strategies for overcoming them within the journal, an event was organised to bring together practitioners and academics from different sectors (science communication, cultural heritage, public health, civic participation, international development and community design) to unearth experiences of research engagement and analyse ways of translating and representing those experiences as journal contributions.

This paper reflects on the process and outcomes of the event (itself an example of a process of co-production) to show how multiple experiences and literacies can at the same time be recognised and mobilised into a single artefact (the journal) and common project (principles for research engagement.) Guided by a framework based on Star and Griesemer's concept of the 'boundary object' (1989) and Strathern's notion of 'fractionality' (1991), a participatory methodology based on collaborative story telling was used to identify the experiences, motivations and literacies of different groups of participants and to explore ways that the journal might mobilise this plurality into a common artefact and collective project. After discussing the framework and methodology, the paper outlines some of the strategies which emerged from the event to guide the further development of the journal, including:

- An accessible 'wrap-around' space on the NCCPE website to facilitate more interaction with journal contributions and link the contributions to other resources, initiatives and training opportunities;
- Innovative use of multimedia within the journal (e.g. video casts and interactive links to other research texts) which might facilitate different modes of representation and respond to different literacies;
- Alternative processes of peer review which support learning (as well as providing a mechanism for quality-control) and also serve to mobilise a community around the journal;
- Peer-writing support for both academic and non-academic contributors.

The paper concludes by addressing the challenges associated with these different strategies and summarising the implications for enhancing 'engagement literacies' through researcher development within and outside of Higher Education.

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