New Waves, Paradigms, and Theory: Moving Public Engagement Forward

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Margaret A. Post, Elaine Ward, Nicholas V. Longo, and John Saltmarsh (Eds.),
Publicly Engaged Scholars: Next-Generation Engagement and the Future of Higher Education.
Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2016, 312 pages. ISBN: 978-1-62036-264-8

Introduction

Collectively, the narratives and reflections contained in Post, Ward, Longo, and Saltmarsh's edited volume, *Publicly Engaged Scholars: Next-Generation Engagement and the Future of Higher Education,* live up to the book's three-part promise: to help others better understand (1) the context in which the next generation of publicly engaged scholars is coming into engaged work; (2) their interests, motivations, experiences, career goals, and challenges; and (3) potential future paths and considerations for moving the public engagement field forward. Alongside this promise, the book expands on a new paradigm for publicly engaged work—the "collaborative engagement" paradigm. According to the editors, "what makes collaborative engagement distinctive is its focus on community, the recognition that learners are co-creators of knowledge through democratic education, and the involvement of a diverse range of participants in deliberative conversations to address real-world problems" (p. 62).

Those who would benefit most from reading this book are those who are looking for a fresh take on public engagement and its future, those who want to understand the current (and perhaps upcoming) generational differences within the public engagement field, and also emerging publicly engaged scholars who are seeking advice and kinship with others who do the work they do.

Broad Overview of the Book

The broad aims of the book are to help readers understand emerging and newly emerged publicly engaged scholars and the context in which these scholars find themselves doing their work. The use of a collaborative approach to writing and the use of narrative to expand on points of interest are evident throughout the book. They are reflected in how the sections and chapters are structured, as well as in the collaborative engagement paradigm advocated for in the book.

Part One: The Collaborative Engagement Paradigm

Chapter 1 begins with a summary of the new "collaborative engagement" paradigm, which helps set the stage for the remaining chapters. Chapters 2 and 3 provide a historical overview of the development of civic engagement—a precursor to collaborative engagement. Chapter 4 is devoted to the role of teaching and learning in the new collaborative engagement paradigm. It highlights the need to include the concepts of deliberative dialogue, democratic education, and community engagement in pedagogy, as well as the importance of an asset-based orientation undergirding each of these concepts. Chapter 5 is devoted to an exploration of how research done through the collaborative engagement paradigm is different from traditional research. It argues that research done in this new way will increase both the relevance of the research and its potential benefit to society. To do so, it must include community-driven priorities; shared, equitable decision-making; a focus on social and cultural change; and co-creation of knowledge. Finally, Chapter 6 focuses on institutional structures, procedures, and policies that must change if we are to see the adoption of this new collaborative engagement paradigm within higher education. Key to this transformation will be addressing issues of legitimacy, agency, and inequality regimes within higher education institutions, as well as how these issues influence the work of publicly engaged scholars. Higher education institutions have proven notoriously slow to change; therefore, as we work toward a collaborative engagement paradigm, it is important for publicly engaged scholars to also build strategic social networks to create a sense of fit and agency in their work. They must sustain themselves in their work, even as they seek change in how they do their work.

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Part Two: New Public Scholars

The narratives included in Part Two represent voices of emerging and newly emerged publicly engaged scholars, some of whom are further along in their careers, education, and aging than others, but all of whom question the current status quo of higher education and public engagement. The opening to Part Two and Chapter 7 together explain the impetus behind this book, with each of the following chapters representing the voices and experiences of 22 emerging and newly emerged publicly engaged scholars. Chapter 8 focuses on five emerging scholars and their pathways into public engagement. From there, Chapter 9 highlights four newly emerged scholars who identify as scholar-practitioners and who have created hybrid staff/faculty roles for themselves within higher education. Chapter 10 includes four publicly engaged scholars for whom the focus of their engaged work is highly oriented toward the community, with two scholars working inside higher education and two working outside higher education. Chapter 11 brings in the voices of four newly emerged scholars working in faculty roles in higher education but with varying paths into their work. Finally, Chapter 12 summarizes these 22 narratives by highlighting common tensions and concerns, including: professional development, identity development, legitimacy, marginalization, and validation. It also questions what these tensions and concerns might mean for the future of higher education.

Part Three: The Future of Engagement

The future of public engagement will rely not only on understanding the next generation(s) of publicly engaged scholars, but also on understanding the reality of today's higher education landscape. It will also take acknowledging how this reality could be altered to reflect a new vision for higher education that includes public engagement as a core principle. Chapter 13 highlights the importance of student voice and power in creating this new vision, while at the same time highlighting challenges of doing so in light of increased institutionalization of public engagement leading to more bureaucratic control. It also argues that we should be training students to lead in a way that asks them to challenge the current paradigm rather than merely working within it. Chapter 14 further notes that we should move beyond a false dichotomy of a capitalist knowledge regime in competition with a public knowledge regime within higher

education. Rather, we should focus on building a new vision for higher education that transcends either of these regimes—a public engagement knowledge regime. Finally, Chapter 15 notes that perhaps a blended form of public engagement, which includes an ecosystem comprised of civic engagement, workforce development, and diversity and inclusion, represents the way forward. In this chapter, Cleveland State University is presented as an example of how higher education institutions might move forward with making public engagement a core principle of higher education.

Central Issues Raised and Critiques of the Book

Of the key issues raised in this book, several stand out to me: the discussion of generational differences in the field of public engagement, the use of theory to understand why and how these differences exist, and the collaborative engagement paradigm that frames these differences.

Generational Differences

While I can appreciate a need to distinguish among individuals and groups of publicly engaged scholars, from the evidence offered in the book, who constitutes the next generation seems dependent on your point of view. For example, I would categorize myself as next generation, and those profiled in the book would also classify themselves as next generation. However, when reading about those profiled, I thought to myself, these mostly seem to be the current generation, not the next generation. Many scholars profiled in the book have completed their doctoral studies and/or have director roles or tenure-track positions, while I am only in my third year of doctoral studies and still only hold a coordinator position. There is a need to empirically test the idea of generational differences among publicly engaged scholars. Without having a more concrete definition of who is next generation, I think the term next generation can come across as ageist, implying that the previous generation is out of date and no longer has anything useful to offer. For example, think of how we update our mobile phones to the next generation model. We completely replace one with another. Perhaps a better way to approach this subject would be talking about waves of scholars entering the field. Waves do not necessarily entirely replace one another and may in fact build on each other. Yet each is still unique. Sandmann, Thornton, and Jaeger (2011) use this terminology when describing the first wave of Carnegie Community Engagement Institutions. These waves of publicly

engaged scholars would still need to be defined more concretely, but I do think this terminology would be more inclusive.

The Use of Theory

Beyond a change in terminology, I would advocate for more in-depth use of theory in analyzing and interpreting the narratives of publicly engaged scholars. The Afterword of the book calls for stronger use of theory in understanding the personal narratives put forth in Part 2. Perhaps more importantly, it also calls for the creation of new theory from these types of narratives. I agree with the conclusion that more use of theory will help advance the field of public engagement, just as it did feminist studies and civil rights studies, and that we cannot rely solely on narratives of personal experience to move the field forward. So while it is heartening that the topic of theory was included in the Afterword, more use of theory throughout the book, specifically to help readers understand the narratives presented in Part 2, would have strengthened the book. For example, from the field of higher education there are multiple theories that might be applied, among them identity development (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007) and career development (Brown & Lent, 2005). Additionally, the creation of theory from the narratives found in the book would also have been an important contribution to the field. Although the collaborative engagement paradigm helps frame the book, such frameworks only speak to what is, not necessarily the why and the how of what is, as a theory would. Future research, especially taking a grounded theory approach, could focus on developing theory to explain why and how publicly engaged scholars are moving toward the collaborative engagement paradigm put forward in the book.

The Collaborative Engagement Paradigm

To me, the collaborative engagement paradigm is one of the most intriguing aspects of the book, and it is tied to the ongoing conversation in the public engagement field regarding how we define exactly what it is that we do as publicly engaged scholars. The model presented in the book briefly details how deliberative dialogue, democratic education, and community engagement all contribute to the new paradigm of collaborative engagement described and advocated for in the book. A more detailed exploration of each of these areas, citing prior scholarship, would be a welcome addition to future work on the collaborative engagement paradigm. Additionally, although it is

mentioned in the written description of the model (p. 62), the addition of an asset-based orientation as undergirding these concepts would be a useful addition to the visual representation of the model (p. 63), as would references to the work of leading scholars in the area of asset-based community development, such as Kretzman and McKnight (1996).

Conclusion

In summary, the strengths of this book lie in how it sets readers up to understand the next generation of publicly engaged scholars in Part One, provides examples of varying kinds of newly emerged and emerging scholars in Part Two, and finally sets the stage for thinking about how to envision the new collaborative engagement paradigm advocated for in Part Three. In terms of weaknesses, I believe one of them is addressed in the Afterword—the need for more use of theory. Future work on this topic could also re-examine the collaborative engagement paradigm to add more depth and a more holistic visual to this model. Finally, more research and better terms and definitions are needed as we seek to describe each successive group of publicly engaged scholars.

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About the Reviewer

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