Review Essay

Scholarship Redefined

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Publicly Engaged Scholars: Next-Generation Engagement and the Future of Higher Education

Margaret A. Post, Elaine Ward, Nicholas V. Longo, & John Saltmarsh (Eds.)
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Publicly Engaged Scholars emerges from the Next Generation Engagement Project, a collaboration between the New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE), the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), and Imagining America (IA), and is “led by a group of recognized scholars and practitioners to develop and implement civic engagement initiatives aimed at the next generation of students, faculty, and scholars in higher education” (New England Resource Center for Higher Education, n.d.). The book’s contributors include scholars from a wide range of disciplines committed to co-created knowledge, the transformative power of narrative and dialogue, and “higher education as a vehicle to increase equality and justice in society” (p. xx).

This book arrives at an important moment in the history of service-learning and community engagement (SLCE) in higher education. In many ways, efforts to integrate community engagement into the academy have been tremendously successful, evidenced by the upsurge in SLCE research and practice across a wide range of academic disciplines, and by the expansion of institutional support through, for example, the creation of service-learning centers on campuses and the promotion of national agendas for SLCE in higher education by such influential organizations as the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the American Association of Colleges & Universities. However, most of the work to date has been inwardly focused, examining the positive impact of the pedagogy on college students and calling for changes within the academy to support engaged scholarship; less attention has been paid to the nature and potential of campus-community partnerships, particularly the role and experience of “the community” in those partnerships.

The growing support for service-learning and engaged scholarship across the academy has led to many creative approaches to this work in the U.S. and abroad. Yet the building enthusiasm for and the rapid, outward expansion of the practice leave it vulnerable to “growing pains” and a certain shallowness. Indeed, critics have lodged complaints against the field for lacking depth and an intellectual core (Butin, 2011; Stewart & Webster, 2011). This is the context in which *Publicly Engaged Scholars* emerges, and the context it reflects and attempts to address.

The book’s editors note in the introduction:

The central argument of this book is that a new generation of scholars, educators, and practitioners is committed to the public purposes of higher education, but not committed to perpetuating the existing policies, structures, and practices that have delegitimized their epistemological and ontological position. (p. 2)

The volume pays overdue and significant attention to the “public” in publicly engaged scholarship, making a strong case for renewing higher education’s commitment to addressing community concerns, particularly in the wake of neoliberal policies and the devolution of public responsibility to the private sector and to individuals. It argues for expanding notions of what counts as “scholarship,” acknowledging the important contributions that community partners can and do make in knowledge production, and identifying the need for substantial changes in the academy to support engagement practices that address issues of working between the two cultures (the academy and the community) and incorporate multiple points of view.

Yet the vast majority of the book’s 32 contributors are from within the academy. While arriving

via varied pathways and playing diverse roles, they nevertheless reflect the field's emphasis on university perspectives over community ones – even when the former underscores the significance of the latter. The nearly two dozen individual narratives recounted by “next generation” scholars in Part Two of the book are compelling but particularly inward looking. While embedded in the context of higher education and cognizant of the challenges facing engaged scholars in this context, the narratives are not well connected to the broader historical or conceptual contexts of SLCE – macro-level contexts detailed separately in other chapters, but without an explicit connection to these micro-level accounts. The incredible range of scholarship presented in the book is both a strength and a weakness, as well. It reflects the current breadth of the field while also contributing to an overall lack of clarity about what, exactly, is the work of publicly engaged scholars.

Despite these issues – or perhaps because of them – *Publicly Engaged Scholars* is a very timely book and a worthwhile read. It reflects the work of a current generation of scholars and the work that still remains to advance engaged scholarship's place in the academy.

In this review essay we present a brief overview of the contents of each chapter, followed by a critique of the book as a whole.

The Book's Chapters

In the opening chapter, the book's four editors identify a “Collaborative Engagement Paradigm” embraced by next-generation scholars as a means for “the reclaiming of higher education's public good” (p. 3). The paradigm embraces: (a) scholar-practitioners who connect higher education campuses with problem-solving taking place in communities; (b) increased participation by historically underrepresented groups; (c) a demand for “new modes of scholarship and teaching” (p. 4); (d) scholars who have emerged from undergraduate and graduate experiences in public scholarship and expect to continue in that vein; (e) an orientation to public engagement with respect for the expertise and experiences of all contributors, and (f) a desire to promote an inclusive, deliberative democracy.

In the second chapter, Saltmarsh and Hartley track the history of public scholarship as it was affected by “pure science,” findings in cognitive studies, the relationship of the university and society, the period of civic disengagement, demands for social justice, and neoliberalism. It is an enormous undertaking in just nine pages. The chapter closes with a discussion of the “public engagement knowledge regime,” in which it is considered to be “in the best

interest of the campus's knowledge, learning, and democracy-building mission to be engaged deeply in the education, health, housing, employment, and overall well-being of the local community” (p. 29).

Chapter 3 continues with Hartley and Saltmarsh describing the history of civic engagement in American higher education with a focus on efforts to reclaim the civic mission in the 1980s, especially through a host of organizations (COOL, Campus Compact, ISAS, CNCS, COPC, etc.), national reports and conferences, funded projects, and publications. The clear focus of these efforts centers around service-learning. The chapter closes with a call for greater involvement of scholars who are personally involved in civic life.

Next, Longo and Gibson describe the landscape of teaching and learning in higher education, defining terms (“co-created knowledge,” “deliberative pedagogy,” “democratic education,” “cognitive justice,” etc.) and demonstrating their interplay in collaborative engagement. The chapter concludes by describing how this approach is critical to the future research and teaching missions of higher education in that the well-being of institutions are interwoven with the well-being of their communities.

In Chapter 5, Jacquez, Ward, and Goguen tackle the challenge of describing how engaged research is affecting institutional change, comparing the characteristics of “traditional academic research” and a “collaborative engagement paradigm.” They present a useful table comparing the differences along with four narratives that demonstrate how different young scholars integrate traditional and collaborative research methods.

While Chapter 5 is full of hope and promise, Chapter 6 exposes challenges to the “legitimacy, agency and equality” (p. 97) of engaged scholarship and the cumulative, deleterious effects on the careers of engaged scholars. Author KerryAnn O'Meara examines the role of faculty hierarchies, publication priorities, tenure, promotion ladders, mentoring, and reward structures. She holds that there is an interplay between these factors and an over-representation of persons of color, women, and first-generation scholars engaged in public scholarship and, as a result, it is they who are most negatively affected by the current climate of the academy. The author closes the chapter with some possible steps forward in addressing the challenges, such as developing community-driven research priorities that emphasize democratic decision-making and the co-creation of knowledge.

Part Two of the book (Chapters 7–12) includes narratives by twenty-two “next generation” scholars describing the distinct pathways leading them to publicly engaged scholarship. Chapter 7 focuses

on scholars' difficulty bringing their personal and professional lives into alignment. In this chapter, Janke, Miller, Post, and Ward discuss what it means to be a "boundary spanner" (scholar-administrator-community advocate for social justice), the disconnect between the categories of problems in the world and the way that higher education is organized by disciplines, the different "languages" used in communities and in academia, and the need for collaboration to understand and marshal against the existing academic culture and traditional conceptualizations of scholarship.

Chapter 8 details what is involved in developing a "community-engaged scholarly identity." Beck, Bush, Holguin, Morgan, and Orphan offer their individual as well as their collective struggles to identify and share pathways to engaged scholarship. They discuss the role of undergraduate experiences, community building, sharing stories, selecting graduate programs and mentors, and finding "pressure points and cracks" that offer a greater opportunity for a new paradigm of scholarship. A number of the authors discuss the added challenges inherent in being a first-generation scholar of color.

This theme continues in Chapter 9 as Green, Harrison, Jones, and Shaffer set forth their views about how their work and experiences challenge the "dominant narratives of higher education" that reinforce the belief that "scholarship" is to foster "basic research, intellectual tradition and education" and the "cult of the expert" (p. 142). They take pride in working across disciplines, within communities, and embracing both practitioner and scholar roles. They hold that an administrator within higher education can be legitimately considered a scholar and partner with members of the community in that scholarship. However, they admit that staff members (and non-tenured faculty) do not enjoy the academic freedom and contractual security of tenured faculty and call for "established criteria for evaluation specific to community-engaged scholar-practitioners" (p. 151).

In Chapter 10, Hartman, Sanchez, Shakya, and Whitney present four narratives describing how young scholars have attempted to navigate the difficult and challenging terrain of living in two worlds – campus and community – and how a focus on the research needs of the community can contribute to solutions to local issues. They describe how their work leads them to collaborative approaches that seek the expertise and knowledge of community partners, the need to be guided by a sense of justice rather than the norms of the academy, and to engage in a "collaborative, participatory . . . reflective process . . . reciprocal dialogue and mutual education" (p. 163). Their work has a democratic orientation

with full participation, sharing of knowledge and expertise, and full and open access to results. Along the way, a sense of community develops. They hold that their approach presents a "moral imperative for faculty members and students" (p. 166).

The route to engaged scholarship as experienced by Anderson-Nathe, Jacquez, Kerns-Wetherington, and Mitchell in Chapter 11 is portrayed as a series of "fortunate accidents" and "winding pathways." The brief biographies of the four scholars describe their journeys toward "engaged scholarship," which were seldom well-planned but guided by a passion to follow their personal sense of justice and authenticity.

The final chapter in Part Two, Chapter 12 by Ward and Miller, attempts to summarize the themes emerging from the 22 narratives and provides a good overview for those eager to take away the lessons of Part Two, and include: (a) navigating the tensions, (b) spanning boundaries, (c) altering the legitimacy of expertise, (d) marginalization and validation, (e) implications for higher education, (f) implications for future community-engaged scholars, and (g) reclaiming higher education's larger public purpose.

The final section of the book, Part Three, looks ahead to the future of engagement, beginning with Chapter 13, which advocates for engaging students as colleagues (Longo, Keisa, & Battistoni). The authors describe the role of service-learning on students' civic engagement and weigh the negative and positive effects of institutionalizing service-learning. They document a new approach to student involvement in which students see their "work in communities . . . not as an alternative to politics but rather as 'alternative politics'" (p. 201).

The authors also discuss the need for students (and presumably engaged scholars) to work with community partners over considerable time to foster "civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions" (p. 203). Further, the commitment to community must be embedded in higher education institutions and be reflected in such structures as faculty recognition and rewards.

Perhaps most critical, the authors maintain that if institutions wish to promote civically engaged students, they must put students at the center of those efforts and honor student voice. Despite the fact that students are transient and community partnerships should be sustained, the authors suggest that students must play critical leadership roles.

Chapter 14, by Orphan and O'Meara, outlines the historic creep of neoliberalism on post-secondary campuses, shifting the financial burden for higher education from the public sphere to students. A preoccupation with the economic value of a col-

lege degree has led to the common perception that the institution exists to serve the individual and the economy rather than society and a learned citizenry. The authors suggest several steps that educational institutions could take that would make them more supportive of public engagement and create more obvious pathways for scholars to serve public needs. For example, they argue that academic departments should provide financial resources, mentoring, coursework, and “ideological support” to encourage engaged scholarship among graduate students.

In Chapter 15, White outlines efforts at Cleveland State University to fully embrace a public mission, presumably as a model for other institutions to emulate.

Critique

If you want to know what is right and wrong with *Publicly Engaged Scholars* – and with the field itself – read the Afterword. Peter Levine summarizes the strengths of the book with this passage:

I concur with the brilliant historical chapters, which capture my personal memories of those times but put what I experienced and observed in a broader context. I find the personal narratives inspiring. And the strategies proposed in part three strike me as the right ones. (p. 249)

As individuals who have been deeply involved in attempting to foster high quality service-learning at a Research 1 campus for several decades, we too understand and appreciate the contributions of the Next Generation Engagement Project. *Publicly Engaged Scholars* offers a richly detailed account of the challenges scholars currently face in attempting to establish a new, more publicly-oriented research and teaching paradigm. We embrace their goal to engage in deliberative practices with students, community members, and colleagues, and salute their commitment to an engaging writing style that values personal narratives and lends itself to public consumption. And we can testify to all of the obstacles cited by the contributing authors, from altering the norms of the academy to affecting change in the educational/research paradigm that prevails on most post-secondary campuses.

We would have liked to have learned more about the actual scholarship of next-generation scholars. The narratives in Part Two focus more on describing the personal pathways to engagement, with less attention to current research questions, methodological approaches, and relevant findings. This may be intentional, given the title of the book, which suggests that it is more about the individual scholars themselves than the content of their scholarship.

It is unclear how the narratives truly mark a generational shift in the work being done across the country. They echo, yet do not acknowledge, the voices of earlier critics of higher education who have tried to make colleges and universities more responsive to public agendas. While Chapter 2 by Saltmarsh and Hartley offers an overview of the history of public scholarship and engagement, it focuses primarily on large convenings of stakeholders, declarations by national associations, and scholarly works that describe trends. However, the chapter overlooks the work of a number of grassroots “pioneers” who built upon the actions of students in the ‘60s and ‘70s (e.g., the civil rights, anti-war, and free speech movements) to link classroom education to problems in the world by creating service-learning programs and building bridges between campuses and local communities (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). The chapter also might have included an historical overview of the civic mission of graduate education (Stanton & Wagner, 2006).

Without this history, the book neglects already-tested models and experiences, leaving next-generation scholars susceptible to repeating the same or similar mistakes while also depriving them of a fairly well-worn path. In addition, the book describes a compelling yet utopian vision of what the university “should” become without a clear set of strategies for achieving these goals.

Returning to the Afterword, Levine uses his few pages in the book to deftly explore the logical problems inherent in various approaches to thinking about the causes of and solutions to social problems – i.e., problems of discourse and collective action. These are thorny, theoretical problems that are, for the most part, unexplored in the volume, save Levine’s contribution and a few key questions posed by Hartman. Levine’s thoughtful and thought-provoking commentary serves less to summarize the text than to subtly point out its flaws – flaws that are, as he notes, pervasive in the field. He writes:

This book has a generational focus and looks to younger scholars for new models and solutions. Those scholars will (and should) base many of their ideas on personal experience and identity. Their relatively diverse background and their relatively deep experience with engagement are assets. Yet I would also look to the next generation for groundbreaking theory, some of it highly abstract and challenging. The theories that are already embedded in their narratives must emerge; they may also need to develop new theoretical insights. We need theories not only about civic engagement but also about how society works and what causes it to

change for the better. Almost every successful social movement I can think of has developed new bodies of such theory. The theories of gender that accompanied second-wave feminism or the range of theological and political philosophies that emerged because of the civil rights movement are essential historical examples. I would expect nothing less from the next generation of engagement. (p. 256)

With this passage, Levine pinpoints a core problem in the text: the absence of a clear, underlying framework for understanding “public scholarship” that ties together the entire volume. Part of this conceptual challenge is related to language. Far too many terms are introduced and used almost interchangeably, including public engagement, public engagement knowledge regime, collaborative engagement, public scholar(ship), engaged scholarship, next generation scholarship/engagement, civic engagement, community engagement, and democratic engagement. Very likely this is due to the wide range of disciplines in which the contributors were trained. This is an editing challenge; the editors of the book could have done more to create a clear storyline that weaves through the various chapters. But it is also, as Levine suggests, a challenge facing the field. Although contributions to public scholarship, service-learning, and civic engagement have grown tremendously in the last 40+ years, the “movement” still lacks a unified core; the book – and the field – still needs to articulate a foundational disciplinary framework (Butin, 2011). *Publicly Engaged Scholars* offers many important insights about the pathways to public scholarship and the challenges such scholars face, but it fails to offer a clear, coherent strategy for the field moving forward.

The problem with not having a clear framework is perhaps most evident in the chapter describing Cleveland State University’s successes in promoting publicly engaged scholarship at the institutional level. While the book provides a robust critique of the market-driven, neoliberal policies that are driving higher education, ironically it concludes by presenting a “model” university whose practices reflect exactly that: a top-down, administrator-led, corporate-structured initiative driven by market forces with minimal input from faculty and even less from students or the community. This is not meant to be a criticism of the work at Cleveland State University but rather a commentary on the disconnect between this chapter and most of the arguments that precede it. White’s account demonstrates how universities can make significant, positive impacts even while conforming to the very things this book criticizes about higher education.

Perhaps, at this juncture, it makes sense to focus on what works – clear strategies implementable in the current climate and that can move the field, however incrementally, toward larger and truly transformative goals. Nevertheless, we need to do a better job of unearthing “the theories that are already embedded in [our] narratives” (p. 256).

Some might argue, appropriately so, that certain sectors of the field are overburdened by theory. In fact, the writing in some disciplines is highly abstract and theorized to the point of not being connected to the messiness of actual experience. We must think more carefully about how to theorize this work, building on the past without being shackled by it, and fundamentally connect theory to practices.

In short, while the book lacks an adequate theoretical and historical foundation, its overall argument about next-generation engagement and the future of higher education is a compelling and important one. The authors’ inclusivity and demonstrated capacity to learn from one another, as well as the fresh, optimistic, “bring on the world” attitude that permeates the book, gives us hope. Indeed, the authors have tapped into a moral imperative that drives a deep commitment to publicly engaged scholarship that benefits communities and students; this next generation of engaged scholars may very well transform the culture of higher education.

The proverb, “We make the road by walking,” inspired many of the experiential educators and service-learning practitioners who pioneered the current civic engagement movement (Bell, Gaventa, & Peters, 1990). May this motto provide a similarly fruitful path for the next generation of publicly engaged scholars.

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