A REVIEW of KF Research:

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The range of our understanding of democracy—civic renewal

Insights about democracy—insights about changing practice
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case, kids) as partners and assets, not as bundles of problems. They also emphasize local geographical communities as excellent subjects for youth to study and as venues for youth work. The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development and the Forum for Youth Investment are important hubs in this movement. The Coalition for Community Schools brings a similar set of values to its work with K-12 schools.

In Hampton, Virginia (and to a lesser extent in other communities), youth have been integrated into the city’s governance. Youth are recruited into school and neighborhood boards, where they make significant contributions to their communities. Leaders emerge and are tapped for the citywide police and school advisory boards, which have major influence.

The Strength of the Movement

I am convinced that the civic renewal movement whose main elements I have mentioned so far forms a reasonably tight and robust network. That claim could be tested by interviewing leaders about their ties to other groups and analyzing the resulting network data. Lacking the resources to conduct interviews, I have examined the electronic links among organizations’ Web sites. A Web link provides imperfect evidence of actual collaboration, but it does reveal a conscious decision to connect two organizations.

When software called IssueCrawler analyzes the links among hundreds of Web sites devoted to civic renewal, it finds many connections among institutions concerned with public deliberation, civic education, service-learning, higher education reform, and political reform. Further from the core of this online network are sites for community organizing, urban planning, conflict resolution, and social software. Overall, IssueCrawler reveals that the field is tightly interconnected—confirming what is evident if one attends many face-to-face conferences. Although the network for civic renewal faces daunting challenges, it is a multifaceted, innovative, and increasingly coherent political force in its own right.

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Objective Two

Five Emerging Practices in the Scholarship of Engagement

Derek Barker

This article is excerpted and adapted from his article of the same name in the Higher Education Exchange published by the Kettering Foundation, 2006.

More than ever, higher education professionals are starting to describe their work using the words participatory research, public scholarship, and community partnerships. In fact, words like these are being used in the titles and mission statements of centers, programs, and other initiatives to broaden the idea of scholarship and deepen the connection between higher education institutions and the public realm. For the past few years, I have been tracking these projects as well as the work of independent scholars who have similar approaches. I see an exciting group of academics trying to make the case that civic work makes for good politics—and good scholarship. Civic work helps scholars generate more practical research questions, enables them to collect more data, and allows them to see their ideas working in practice. Engaged scholars are finding that their practices are not something they do on the side in addition to their academic research. They embrace different methods and emphasize varying aspects of democratic politics, but their work can be understood and assessed as a “scholarship of engagement.”

Five emerging practices are showing how higher education professionals can expand the idea of scholarship and enrich the political life of their communities. Each one is animated by a specific theory of democracy, and as a result each one uses its own methods to address a specific set of public problems. What drives these practices is the intent of the scholar, not the methods they employ. While academic scholarship is often driven by the training and expertise of the scholar, engaged scholars are driven by what they intend to accomplish. By thinking about the scholarship of engagement along these dimensions, my intention is to provide a clear and systematic framework through which to understand and assess the work that makes up this movement, while also recognizing its diversity.

The scholarship of engagement concept was first stated in the work of the late Ernest Boyer. Boyer’s work was dedicated to expanding the idea of scholarship beyond research published in peer-reviewed journals, in order to recognize and value all the things that academics actually do. One of Boyer’s later works took a further step to argue that the idea of scholarship could be further broadened to include the scholarship of engagement: practices that overlap with the traditional areas of scholarship but also incorporate practices of collaboration with public entities.

So what does civic work have to do with scholarship? What is “scholarly” about the scholarship of engagement? By linking civic work to scholarship, this terminology reflects a growing awareness that civic work can further academic as well as political goals.

Practices of civic work can also make a difference in what Boyer calls the “scholarship of teaching.” For a long time, the service-learning and experiential-learning movements have been showing that students can benefit from seeing the ideas discussed in the classroom applied practically in the outside world. What the scholarship of engagement adds to these pedagogies is a conscious effort...
at building deeper relationships with communities beyond the idea of “service,” which does not always lead to more enduring forms of engagement. The scholarship of engagement attempts to provide students with greater insight into the nature of public problems by asking students to practice more intense forms of democratic citizenship. Although these practices are often present implicitly in service and experiential-learning programs, they are explicitly and consciously cultivated by the scholarship of engagement. In these ways, far from compromising their seriousness and rigor, engaged scholars are making the case that their work meets or even exceeds traditional norms for assessing scholarship.

So what do engaged scholars do? How does their work contribute to democracy? The scholarship of engagement is distinct from traditional approaches because it integrates practices of civic work into the production of knowledge. It is different, for example, from traditional academic scholarship that simply has to do with civic work. The scholarship of engagement is also distinct from public intellectual scholarship, which takes traditional academic literature and attempts to give it greater visibility in the media. Rather, the scholarship of engagement means finding creative ways to communicate to public audiences, work for the public good, and, most important, generate knowledge with public participation.

To accomplish these goals, engaged scholars are embracing a number of methods and the terminologies that go with them. (See chart.) First, public scholarship is most often used to describe academic work that incorporates practices of deliberative politics to enhance scholarship. Public scholars are usually informed by some combination of the “deliberative” or “participatory” theories of democracy developed by thinkers like John Dewey and Jürgen Habermas.

Participatory scholarship generally emphasizes deliberation over participation—the quality of the discourse rather than the quantity of participants. A common public-scholarship practice is the open public forum. Forums typically address issues of wide concern, and, in particular, they address complex issues that require actual public discussion rather than simply voting or taking a public opinion poll.

The second emerging practice, very closely related to public scholarship, is participatory research, also referred to as action research or participatory action research. Like public scholarship, participatory research stresses the active role citizens can play in the production of academic knowledge. The main difference I see between the two stems from the relative emphases on participation versus deliberation. While public scholars are more concerned with enhancing the quality of public participation in research, for participatory research the emphasis tends to be on promoting participation itself. Participatory research tends to respond to problems of exclusion by reaching out to a marginalized or previously excluded group. Like public scholarship, participatory research is showing that good politics can make for good scholarship. Participatory research and public scholarship are not so much opposed as responding to different problems in democratic politics. Situations may call for building bridges to specific groups to bring more participants into the process, or they may call for improving the quality of discourse of existing groups.

### Five Practices in the Scholarship of Engagement

<table>
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<th>Practice</th>
<th>Theory of Democracy</th>
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<td>Participatory democracy</td>
<td>Exclusion of specific groups</td>
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<td>Community Partnerships</td>
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Engaged scholars are finding innovative ways to blend these approaches in response to specific problems.

The third practice is referred to as community partnerships. Public participation and deliberation may be key components of community partnerships, but the primary emphasis in this field tends to be on cultural transformation. As a result, one might say that community partnerships are animated primarily by a conception of social democracy. In contrast to other forms of engaged scholarship, community partnerships are especially concerned with power, resources, and building social movements. While community partnerships often overlap with public scholarship and participatory research practices, this approach tends to emphasize the end result of social transformation over the process and its political qualities.

Fourth, many of the scholarship of engagement centers are creating public information networks. These networks typically help communities identify resources and assets by providing comprehensive databases of local activists, advocacy groups, and available services. While these programs do not always stress the iterative and deliberative quality of the forms of engaged scholarship, they use university resources to better inform public judgments and enrich the quality of discourse. Public information programs are best suited to deal with situations in which the resources already exist in a community to solve a problem but they are not being utilized effectively due to a lack of organization or communication.

A final approach emphasizes civic skills and/or civic literacy. Regardless of one's specific conception of democracy, any healthy democracy requires at least a minimal competence in knowledge of political institutions, economics, and science and technology to make educated and informed decisions. Scholarship conceived as an expert practice reserved for a few specialists further undermines the public's capacity for effective participation. Engaged scholars in this field are helping to enhance democratic processes by ensuring that their disciplines are supplying publics with the knowledge necessary for reflective judgments on public issues. This approach again aims at deepening practices of engagement with the specific aim of reducing the separation between expert specialists and the lay public, as well as by its specific emphasis on skills that are relevant to political participation and democratic decision making. At the same time, civic literacy approaches differ from other forms of engaged scholarship by targeting relatively broad and long-term trends in general public knowledge rather than specific and immediate problems.

One sign that these practices are catching on as both good politics and good scholarship is the development of specific criteria for the assessment of engaged scholarship. Assessment work may impose challenging standards for the scholarship of engagement movement, but it helps make the case to promotion and tenure committees that practices of engagement are central to the research and teaching goals of the profession. Although assessment is not itself engagement (and I do not include it among the five practices), this work is a critical component of the engaged-scholarship universe.

The reality of the scholarship of engagement universe is, of course, fluid and complex and cannot be easily reduced into boxes. The terms I have identified do not have settled definitions. They are closely related and easily confused with one another and, at times, are even used interchangeably. Moreover, these practices are by their very nature—and by the nature of democracy itself—experimental and in constant flux. Engaged scholars are not trying to set up a universal rule for the “best” method of engagement, but rather to respond to particular problems in democratic politics. All engaged scholarship addresses problems that are broadly “public” in nature, but some of them may be short-term and particular in nature, while others may contribute to the common good in broad or long-term ways. Engaged scholarship can emphasize the processes of democratic decision making, or the substantive results of social transformation. Complete standardization would be neither possible nor desirable.

Still, a degree of clarity can help other scholars replicate these emerging practices, and shared meanings would help the field establish both intellectual and political legitimacy. In tracking the activities of higher education civic work centers, I have been finding that the concept of the scholarship of engagement has been catching on. On the one hand, it is focused enough to capture the distinct qualities and contributions of engaged scholarship. The scholarship of engagement is not something that academics do on the side as opposed to “serious” scholarship. Rather, the scholarship of engagement has developed specific methods and criteria for assessment, and it is making identifiable contributions to academic disciplines on their own terms. On the other hand, the scholarship of engagement is an inclusive concept that reflects the great diversity in the theory and practice of this growing movement. The scholarship of engagement includes an exciting array of theoretical approaches toward the renewal of democratic politics, and it recognizes that teaching, research, and any of the traditional scholarly functions can be broadened to incorporate practices of democratic politics. Most of all, the concept is catching on because it is both scholarly and political, capturing both aspects of a distinct, growing, and exciting movement.

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