Fueling the Civic Imagination: Exercising the Values of Democratic Civic Engagement in Assessment Work

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Assessing the Practices of Public Scholarship [APPS] Research Group

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AAC&U National Conference Preconference, Washington, D.C., January 24th, 2018
Where are we now?
Where are we going?
Assessing the Practices of Public Scholarship [APPS]

Who we are:

- Transdisciplinary research group within Imagining America
- Over our history, blend of community arts practitioners, academics, students and practitioners

What we do:

- Promote assessment that realizes the values and transformative potential of community engagement.
Assessing the Practices of Public Scholarship [APPS]:

VEA—DEA Timeline

2008
“scholarship in public” and “the curriculum project”

2009
“integrated assessment”

2015
“values-engaged assessment”

2017
“democratically engaged assessment”

APPS Values
- Full Participation
- Co-creation
- Generativity

- Rigor [intellectual and ethical]
- Practicability
- Resilience

MJCSL article Green Paper

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In your galaxy, who owns assessment?
Resisting the “Shutdown”...and reclaiming assessment
Reclaiming assessment

- more than technique—it’s socio-cultural practice
- operates across communities of practice
- Practice of SLCE spans multiple assessment CoPs simultaneously
- “values” variably understood, contested & enacted
- recognizing these forces at play in your own work is first step to reclaiming power/agency.
Reclaiming assessment: an act of resistance?

Share authority

Concentrate authority

Challenge Norms

Work within established norms

Realize ideals in the world

Within/across institutions and systems

Be efficient

Be efficacious

Be pragmatic in the world

Assessment as/for civic agency, efficacy, solidarity, learning and deliberative decision-making & healing

We nudge ourselves toward a better world

Values negotiation in relationship with diverse others
Imagine

“Assessment is... "a laboratory to fuel the civic imagination."

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Assessment is always undergirded by values.

Most important to ask “which values?” and “who determines them?”

Do we default to a set of values, let ourselves be pressured into alignment with others’ values, or deliberately choose the values that guide our assessment.

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How we commitment to democratic engagement...

Table 1: Commitments of Democratic Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With (not merely in, on, to, for)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asset-based (not merely needs-based)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-directional flow of ideas and questions within a web of knowledge centers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborations that involve not merely transactional exchanges but that are potentially transformative (of self, others, organization/institutions, systems, paradigms)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-roles / powershift / disruptions of hierarchy – all partners positioned as co-creators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Selected values negotiated in DEA

- Full Participation
- Co-Creation
- Resilience
- Practicability
- Generativity
- Rigor (intellectual and ethical)

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“Imagining” full participation

What would/does it look like to enact “full participation” in your assessment work?
### Wrestling with “Rigor” as a value

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constricting Notions of Rigor</th>
<th>Democratic Notions of Rigor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rigor mortis, static</td>
<td>Does not assume limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatekeeping term with a purpose to exclude those without research expertise. Includes some types of knowledge and omits others. Epistemically unjust.</td>
<td>Includes multiple knowledges/diverse voices. Epistemically inclusive and just.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code for not listening; devaluing relational knowledge.</td>
<td>Can bring stakeholders together to listen, respect one another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumes a hierarchy of knowledge creation. Privileges expert knowledge.</td>
<td>Encourages conversation, dialogue between local and expert knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing only things you can count (quantitative methods)</td>
<td>Values multiple methods, forms of data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumes objectivity</td>
<td>Questions objectivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumes there is one right way</td>
<td>Questions assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone else’s framework (administrators, donors, public relations). Rigged!</td>
<td>Framework co-created by stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Offers protection from skeptics, critics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encourages concentration, intentionality, ambition, and thorough-mindedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethical reflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Negotiating & Enacting Values in DEA

**People**
- Whose values guide the project?
- What role(s) do I play in this project?
- Who decides?

**Processes**
- Who’s included and excluded?
- How are they involved?
- When?
- Who decides?

**Purposes**
- Why do we do assessment?
- Who decides?

**Products & Evidence**
- What counts?
- What has value?
- Who decides?
- How to harvest what can’t be counted?
- Alignment with values?
What resonates with you in this idea?

What possibilities does it offer?

What questions do you have?

What do you want to take home and try?

What’s one practice you would change?

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