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Engaged Excellence

Interrogating an Engaged Excellence Approach to Research

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1 Introduction

In recent years several debates have emerged about how to make academic research more 'engaged'. The motivation for these debates has varied from a recognition that engagement can help increase the impact of research, to normative arguments that research needs to engage with those it seeks to help or change, and epistemological arguments that the multifaceted nature of truth necessitates the engagement of multiple perspectives. This report will outline these debates, drawing out some of the emerging epistemological, normative and pragmatic arguments for what the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) has now come to call 'engaged excellence' (IDS 2015). The main literature it will draw on comprises the following: the science–policy debates around Mode 1 and 2 research; debates within the philosophy of science; arguments for why a participatory action research (PAR) approach is increasingly being used in the social sciences, health, social work and education; and debates about what it means to be an engaged university or scholar. It will also draw on some of the debates emerging from a push to decolonise academia, where those debates touch on issues of engagement and whose knowledge counts.

It will then consider what these arguments mean for the four pillars of engaged excellence that we have identified at IDS (IDS 2015) – delivering high-quality research; mobilising impact-orientated evidence; co-constructing knowledge; and building enduring partnerships – while emphasising their interdependence. Within these pillars, the cross-cutting themes of ethics, and teaching and learning will also be explored.

Thus far, IDS has defined engaged excellence as meaning that the high quality of our work (excellence) is dependent upon its being linked to and involving those who are at the heart of the change we wish to see (i.e. it is engaged).

So in this definition, excellence is dependent on engagement, and grammatically, engaged is an adjective and excellence is a noun. However, we are also concerned with the excellence of our engagement – excellent engagement – where excellent is an adjective and engagement is a noun. Therefore it is important to understand what is meant by engagement and how the quality of engagement is understood and assessed. It is also important to understand if, and how, engagement affects how we understand research excellence or quality.

2 Why ‘engaged excellence’? An emerging consensus in academia?

2.1 What is engaged excellence?

It is interesting that, as Silka (2010: 3) notes, many of the debates about making research more engaged have been happening in isolation from each other ‘using different terminology and disciplinary frameworks… [and] not citing each other’s work or incorporating each other’s perspectives’. This report attempts to bring these debates together and highlight synergies, whilst recognising differences.

In all the literature reviewed for this report, there is debate about what counts as engagement, while strong arguments are made that research that claims to be engaged should be more explicit about what that means. Brandt *et al*. (2013: 2) argue that the engagement between researchers and practitioners

> can occur at very different intensities… rang[ing] from: (i) ‘Information’ which involves one-way communication of information in a more limited form, (ii) ‘Consultation’ which demands closer communication including responses, (iii) ‘Collaboration’ which demands that participants have notable influence on the outcome, and (iv) ‘Empowerment’ where the authority to decide is given to the practitioners.

They also found that engagement happened at different stages of the research process. An important point here is the amount of influence practitioners or citizens have over the whole research process. Are they engaged throughout, or only at certain points? Do they have control over the questions asked, the way data are collected, analysed and documented? The answers to these questions make a significant difference to the potential impact of their engagement. There are also ethical dimensions to this as well, in terms of who owns the knowledge produced and how it is represented.

Therefore, there are diverse ways through which researchers can engage with practitioners and with each other, and the depth and type of engagement will depend not only on the kind of research, but also on the motivation for engagement.

Rosendahl *et al*. (2015: 24) argue that in engaged research all participants should have ‘a notable influence on the outcome… and effectively engage in equal terms, actively contributing to knowledge co-generation and mutual learning… [However], [d]ifferent stakeholders necessarily bring their pre-existing power to the transdisciplinary process, creating a situation of power asymmetry.’ This is a very important point, made in much of the literature. Power relations will have an effect on the process of engagement and there is a need to be explicitly cognisant of power relations in the design of any engaged research.

This report will argue that to be of high quality, research must be engaged. This is based on epistemological arguments, ethical arguments and pragmatic arguments.

2.2 Epistemological arguments for engaged excellence

The epistemological arguments for engaged excellence stem from the basic premises that (1) knowledge is situated and pluralistic, and (2) that scientific knowledge and society are co-produced.

2.2.1 Knowledge is situated and pluralistic

The constructivist epistemological position argues that knowledge is situated and always represents the standpoint of the knower (Pietrykowski 2015: 244; Haraway 1988). Knowledge is socially constructed through our experience and interactions, so our own experience will affect our interpretation of what is valid knowledge (Lincoln *et al*. 2011: 103–4).

Harding (1995), undertaking a feminist critique of science, argues that certain individuals and institutions have more influence over the interpretation of what is valid knowledge, but this privilege often conceals a blind spot. Those exercising it are unable to see how social structures reinforce and reproduce the dominance of their ideas and agendas over those of others, and therefore they do not recognise their own biases (Rosendahl *et al*. 2015). Harding calls for research to start from the perspectives of marginal lives, and to incorporate multiple and contradictory perspectives that can challenge those blind spots and biases (*ibid*.). This means that academic researchers need to acknowledge their own interpretive biases (Pietrykowski 2015) and recognise that they can never be neutral observers.

This implies that research needs to include diverse, marginalised, subaltern and contradictory perspectives in order to create a 'less false' account of a phenomenon. This is what Harding calls 'strong objectivity' (1995).

Participatory action research (PAR) explicitly responds to the need to acknowledge multiple perspectives on knowledge, in particular the need to value and incorporate subaltern knowledge into research processes through the participation of practitioners and/or citizens. It aims to shift 'the power of knowledge production into a collective process' (Wagaman and Sanchez 2015: 16) and challenges the dominance of researchers as 'experts' (Gaventa and Cornwall 2008).

In making the case for economic research to use a PAR approach, Pietrykowski (2015) states that incorporating knowledge from different standpoints can strengthen the robustness of economic research, arguing that

> the economy is embedded in social and cultural values and norms. As such, the knowledge that economic agents have about the economy represents their particular standpoint. Since facts are always subject to interpretation and different standpoints offer the possibility for different, legitimate interpretations, a diversity of standpoints can improve the process of scientific research in economics.
> (Pietrykowski 2015: 258)

There is a link between the epistemological argument that knowledge is situated and pluralistic, and the normative argument, discussed in Section 2.4, that certain forms of knowledge are privileged over others, and therefore need to be given more value within research processes.

> A PAR framework… acknowledge[s] differences in power and priorities between community members and the researcher, demanding a more flexible and democratic realization of research activities. In being community-informed and collaborative, research processes [can] ensure more diverse, rigorous and accountable findings and understandings.
> (Caxaj 2015: 9)

2.2.2 The co-production of science and society

Jasanoff, writing within the philosophy of science, argues that whether or not it is acknowledged, science and society are always co-produced. Scientific knowledge is never immune from the social, political and economic forces that shape it.

> [S]ociety cannot function without knowledge any more than knowledge can exist without appropriate social supports. Scientific knowledge, in particular, is not a transcendent mirror of reality. It both embeds and is embedded in social practices, identities, norms, conventions, discourses, instruments and institutions – in short, in all the building blocks of what we term the social.
> (Jasanoff 2004a: 2–3)

The implications of this are that any research that ignores this co-production, will only ever produce a partial perspective on a problem. Therefore, engaged research needs to acknowledge and build on this co-production.

Through co-production, 'the workings of science and technology cease to be a thing apart from other forms of social activity… science and society, in a word, are *co-produced*, each underwriting the other's existence' (Jasanoff 2004b: 17). The epistemological consequences are that objectivity, subjectivity and inter-subjectivity need to be included in our explanations of the lived experience of modern societies (Jasanoff 2004a). The methodological implications are that science and society should not be seen in isolation from each other, but in co-production. Jasanoff asks us to consider how knowledge is

> taken up in societies, and how… it affects people's collective and individual identities, permitting some to be experts, others to be research subjects, and still others to be resisters or revolutionaries... it enables normative analysis by following power into places where current social theory seldom thinks to look for it: for example, in genes, climate models, research methods, cross examinations, accounting systems or practice of expert bodies.
> (Jasanoff 2004b: 42)

Jasanoff asks us to look for co-production along four pathways: 'making *identities*, making *institutions*, making *discourses*, and making *representations*' (Jasanoff 2004a: 6).

The epistemological argument for engaged excellence is therefore that because knowledge is situated and pluralistic, and because scientific knowledge is always co-produced with society, research needs to engage with multiple forms of knowledge, from multiple perspectives, and will often need to be transdisciplinary in nature. However, in order to do this effectively, engaged research processes must be alert to unequal power relations and how these affect the participation of those involved. In particular, academic researchers need to acknowledge their positionality, through reflexivity.

2.3 Pragmatic arguments for engaged excellence

There is broad recognition across the literature reviewed that there is often a disconnect between academic research and policymakers and practitioners, and that this disconnect means that knowledge produced through research does not get used (Gibbons *et al*. 1994; Cash *et al*. 2003; Nowotny *et al*. 2003; Funtowiczi and Ravetzi 2003; Bensimon *et al*. 2004; Jasanoff 2004a; Carayannis and Campbell 2009; Watermeyer 2011; Cornell *et al*. 2013; Nielson 2016). There is broad recognition amongst these authors that the way to address this disconnect, and therefore increase the likelihood of knowledge being used, is through research that is more engaged, although what that 'engagement' entails varies.

Within the literature, three problems are identified that contribute to the failure of traditional research often to have an impact.

2.3.1 The problem of representation

First, there is a representation problem with traditional research. As Bensimon *et al*. (2004) put it, 'methods, such as classification, measurement, and the creation of ideal models… rarely provide a picture that reflects the reality of a particular place and people… the

everyday life of the researched'. This means that such methods could produce knowledge that may not be meaningful or useful for those on whom it is supposed to impact.

Cash *et al*. (2003) argue that in order for research to be used, it needs to be legitimate, credible and salient in the eyes of the user. Engaged research should make research more legitimate in the eyes of users, because of their involvement; it should be more credible, owing to the involvement of multiple perspectives; and it should be more salient, as the users will have helped shape the research questions.

There is a long tradition of trying to combine scientific and experiential knowledge in research, in order to make it more representative of people's realities, and therefore increase its usefulness and relevance (see for example Howes and Chambers 1979). In recent years, this approach has been used within climate research. Rice *et al*. (2015: 254) argue that

> [v]aluing people's everyday experiences of climate change and diverse ways of knowing climate (even when they might be scientifically imprecise) provides the possibility for people and communities to act on climate change through the knowledge and experience they already have… Recognizing experiential ways of knowing has three advantages for climate praxis: It enables and legitimates more diverse communities of action, it resists the extraction of climate change from its complex socio-natural entanglements that have place-based meaning, and it provides culturally specific understandings of what is at stake with climate justice.

2.3.2 The problem of incentives for impact

Second, there is a problem with the incentive for traditional research to have an impact beyond academia. '[N]either producers nor users "own the problem" of producing usable knowledge… [T]he scientific enterprise often sees its job as producing knowledge only, rather than producing information that is useful in decision-making' (Dilling and Lemos 2011). Researchers often have no incentive to take responsibility for the practical impact and applicability of the knowledge they produce (beyond references in journal articles).

This means that it falls to users of knowledge to try and interpret academic research. In response to this problem, there has been an increase in the number of knowledge brokers or knowledge intermediaries or boundary organisations. These are people and organisations that interpret and package academic knowledge to make it accessible and useful to policymakers, community organisations and citizens. For a review of this kind of work, see (Turnhout *et al*. 2013).

2.3.3 The problem of solving complex problems

Third, there is the problem that academic knowledge alone is not sufficient to address complex problems. '[K]nowledge from one location or one point of view can no longer sufficiently deal with problems which manifest themselves in thousands of ways across diverse global contexts. Knowledge must be multi-sited and pluralistic in its assumptions and worldviews' (Gaventa and Bivens 2014: 155).

Glover and Silka (2013) support this argument, but at a micro-scale. They argue that

> community problems are messy problems. When, as academics, we limit our discussion partners just to other academics, we are less likely to rub up against this messiness and the attendant complications… In research partnerships, community partners help expose the complex problems in the locality in which they occur, and we are forced to move beyond disciplinary ways of organising knowledge. A change in the culture of inquiry and the knowledge generation may result.
> (Glover and Silka 2013: 48)

This argument calls for a 'recognition that if interpretation is standpoint dependent, then including researchers from a range of diverse standpoints necessarily enhances the quality of the scientific process' (Pietrykowski 2015).

This argument specifically challenges disciplines to work across boundaries. This is something that the Future Earth initiative is trying to encourage within research on sustainability. Mauser *et al*., writing about this initiative, argue that 'specifically tailored (discipline-based) scientific questions often do not address the grand societal challenges and are therefore of inadequate scope and scale for the… grand research challenges of sustainability despite their being of outstanding importance to the society in which they live' (Mauser *et al*. 2013: 422). They also recognise that working across disciplinary boundaries can be a challenge as current institutional incentives do not encourage it (*ibid*.).

Modes 1, 2 and 3 universities

Within certain fields, a response to these pragmatic arguments has been the shift from Mode 1 (traditional) to Mode 2 universities. This has signalled a change in how universities judge their own success and quality. For Mode 1 universities, academic excellence is judged by a peer review system that assesses how comprehensively research explains a phenomenon (Campbell and Carayannis 2016). For Mode 2 universities, academic excellence is judged by both knowledge producers and users, who together assess how useful the research is for problem solving (*ibid*.). Universities adhering to Mode 2 principles aim to: produce knowledge in the context of application; undertake transdisciplinary research; have heterogeneous organisational structures (e.g. public–private partnerships); and encourage social accountability and reflexivity in the research process (*ibid.*). Table 2.1 shows the modes of knowledge in the two types of university.

A key concept within the idea of Mode 2 universities is the Agora model. In stage 1 of this model, different actors from diverse communities create multi-actor networks to debate and explore possibilities, producing hybridised knowledge in the process (Barre 2001: 15). In stage 2, a decision-making process takes place and 'socially robust' knowledge is produced (*ibid*.). Table 2.2. summarises the dynamics of these two stages and shows how they are a continuous process.

Table 2.1 Changing modes of knowledge production in universities

Mode 1	**Mode 2**
Problems defined by academic community	Knowledge produced in the context of application
Disciplinary knowledge	Transdisciplinary knowledge
Homogeneity: hierarchical and stable institutions	Heterogeneity: diverse, transient and flexible organisations
Research as objective	Research as reflexive and dialogical
Quality control by 'invisible' colleagues	New forms of quality control emphasising social accountability

Source: Bresnen and Burrell (2012: 27).

Table 2.2 The dynamics of the stages in knowledge production

Stage 1: Agora	divergence, opening, exploration, debate, hybridisation ↓
Stage 2: Decision	convergence, decision, closure, stabilisation of knowledge ↓
Stage 1: Agora	divergence, opening, exploration, debate, hybridisation ↓
Stage 2: Decision	convergence, decision, closure, stabilisation of knowledge ↓

Source: Barre (2001: 16).

The underlying assumption of the Agora process is that

> [t]ruth is not in the so-called 'facts', nor in the so-called 'values'; it is in both jointly, in the debate. The usefulness and meaning of scientific expertise will be brought by the debate and not by 'science' in the abstract or in the absolute.
> (Barre 2001: 16)

According to Barre (2001: 16) Agora processes will share the following characteristics:

- they are bottom-up approaches, which can be described as learning processes involving citizens, stakeholders, scientists and a variety of actors having a diversity of stakes and values;
- they represent the basis for a broadly defined political dialogue aiming to give social and economic relevance to technological futures; and
- they depend on the commitment of the actors involved, such commitment bringing the credibility and legitimacy of the whole exercise. This can only be achieved through provision of equal opportunity of participation for all segments, as well as a transparent decision-making.

The shift towards Mode 2 universities has been supported by the Beacons Agenda. This is a

> public engagement agenda for UK Higher Education pursued by the Research Councils UK and facilitated by a network of Beacons for Public Engagement… The Beacon vision is of university experts sharing with and learning from non-expert public groups and in so doing building more cohesive, confident and fluent academic–public knowledge partnerships.
> (Watermeyer 2011)

However, shifting towards Mode 2 is not without challenges nor, indeed, criticism. As Ramaley acknowledges, this 'will require new leadership skills, new ways of learning, new ways of working together across organizational, social and economic lines and new ways of drawing upon insights from many disciplines' (Ramaley 2016). Indeed, Anderson *et al*. state that this argument is not a new one, but the fact that it is still having to be made may point to some systemic challenges that have not yet been overcome (Anderson *et al*. 2013).

A number of authors have been critical of the potential loss of independence, and susceptibility to market forces, that a shift to Mode 2 could imply. Grey (2001) argues that the shift could mean a potential loss of academic autonomy and subject academic research to market forces. Learmonth *et al*. (2012) raise the question of who decides what is considered 'useful' or 'useless' research, which could be driven by fads and/or ideological agendas.

Even those who believe the shift is a positive step recognise the institutional challenges it poses. Bartunek (2007: 1,328) points out that Mode 2 research 'is still limited, because it involves practitioners on academic terms', rather than academics on practitioners' terms. Hodgkinson and Starkey (2011: 360) argue that global standards of academic excellence still 'drive many capable scholars towards Mode 1'. The dominant form of quality control is still peer review (Bresnen and Burrell 2012: 31).

Partly in recognition of some of the challenges and critiques of a shift to Mode 2, some universities are adopting a Mode 3 approach.

> A Mode 3 university… is a type of organization or system that explores ways and approaches of integrating different principles of knowledge production and knowledge application (such as Mode 1 and Mode 2), thus not only promoting diversity and heterogeneity, but also creating creative and innovative organizational contexts for research, teaching (education) and innovation.
> (Campbell and Carayannis 2016)

The pragmatic arguments for engaged excellence are that traditional forms of research have a problem of representation, that there are limited incentives for them to have an impact, and that they often fail to fully address complex global problems. Therefore we need to ensure research represents diverse perspectives and is thus recognisable and relevant to potential users of that research. We need to encourage collective ownership of the impact of research. Finally, we need to acknowledge that often transdisciplinary research may be required to address complex global problems.

2.4 Normative arguments for engaged excellence

The normative arguments for engaged excellence share overlaps with both the epistemological arguments and the pragmatic arguments. If knowledge is situated, pluralistic and co-produced from an epistemological perspective, and if engaging multiple perspectives and knowledges contributes to potentially more robust and impactful research from a pragmatic perspective, then there is a moral imperative to engage multiple perspectives and actors in our research processes. There is an injustice being committed if this is not done, and this argument is made particularly strongly in the literature on decolonising academia.

A key way to address this moral imperative is to democratise knowledge. The motivation for democratising knowledge is cognitive justice. This concept arose from a critique of the dominant Western paradigm of scientific-rational knowledge, and a recognition of the injustice that positivist epistemological positions inflict on subaltern forms of knowledge (Visvanathan 2005; Santos *et al*. 2008). As Gaventa and Bivens argue, 'universities [need] to think not only about justice in the larger world, but also about their own distinctive role in shaping cognitive justice and knowledge democracy. Without cognitive justice – which focuses on whose knowledge counts – the larger struggles for social justice will not be realised' (Gaventa and Bivens 2014: 149).

According to cognitive justice and the pursuit of democratising knowledge, engaged research is not only a moral necessity, it also ensures that more holistic and pluralistic knowledge is produced, which will mean research is better able to address complex problems. A '*knowledge democracy*, [is] where governance is being transformed by the mass creation and availability of knowledge… the quality and validity of knowledge systems for sustainability depend on ensuring plurality, transparency and independence' (Cornell *et al*. 2013).

Another method for pursuing cognitive justice and democratising knowledge has been community–university engagement, which makes pragmatic and ethical arguments for why universities and scholars should be engaged with their local communities. The literature on community–university engagement is vast and diverse, and what counts as engagement varies considerably (Tandon *et al*. 2015). It can cover outreach, community service, community engagement, civic engagement, community-based research and community–university partnerships (*ibid*.). Tandon *et al*. argue that it is only the latter two that address 'the role of academics and the knowledge production capacities of universities as a means to creating social change and structural change' (*ibid*.: 8).

Tandon *et al*. (2015) argue that community–university research partnerships have the potential to democratise knowledge, by which they mean:

- recognition of a multiplicity of epistemologies or knowledge systems;
- knowledge systems are as diverse as the biodiversity of the natural world;
- knowledge is both produced and represented in a dazzling array of methods that go well beyond text and statistics to include ceremony, drama, video, poetry, spirituality;
- knowledge is produced in social movements, community organisations, business, local government, indigenous political organisations and thousands of places in addition to institutions of higher education;
- locally created and owned knowledge is a powerful tool of community and social movement organising;
- knowledge generated in communities or as a result of community–university research partnerships must be made available free of charge and in an open access format (*ibid*.: 9).

Ramaley (2016: 15) uses the Carnegie definition of university–community partnerships, which emphasises '(a) collaboration, (b) mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources and (c) a context partnership and reciprocity'.

Another response to these normative arguments is participatory action research (PAR). The motivation for PAR arises from an explicit acknowledgement that traditional research is often blind to power relations, and PAR actively seeks to address these issues. It recognises that

> Western research is steeped in a monolithic understanding of knowledge that assumes individual ownership of knowledge enabling exploitative practices that can co-opt and distort Indigenous ways of knowing. Thus, addressing issues of power, privilege and representation are key to building co-constructed narratives. (Caxaj 2015)

PAR builds on a tradition of critical pedagogy that explicitly recognised the oppressive nature of colonial 'expert' knowledge and its effect on subaltern knowledge. Both Freire and Fals-Borda 'privilege indigenous ways of knowing as a counterweight to discourses rooted in expert knowledge, technocratic solutions and efficiency criteria' (Pietrykowski 2015). PAR does this through its use of participatory methods that 'seek to counter "hegemonic" approaches where [traditional] research methodology serve to confirm oppressive knowledge' (Mason 2015).

Within feminist critiques of mainstream academia, there have been similar moral arguments made for widening our understanding of what counts as knowledge. Harding calls for us to expand what we 'honor as knowledge' (1986: 24) and others have challenged academic researchers to recognise that our knowledge is situated, and often privileged, and urged us to acknowledge other perspectives (Haraway 1988).

There has been a specific plea for economics to embrace the normative argument for engaging with multiple perspectives on knowledge and to undertake PAR. DeMartino (2011, cited in Pietrykowski 2015: 245) called for an economists' code of ethics, in part as recognition that 'economic policies have had an enormous and often deleterious impact on the lives of ordinary citizens across the globe' (*ibid*.).

A further normative argument is the need to de-colonise academia. This is particularly relevant for development studies. Williams (2013) argues that most development studies institutions are located within universities of the global North, yet they study the global South. Corbridge (2007) argues that development studies is in the paradoxical position of both explaining structural differences between the global North and South, and prescribing

solutions for closing that gap (Williams 2013: 224). Therefore, it has been complicit in ‘presenting people and places of the Global South as being in need of intervention’ (*ibid*.).

Fals-Borda called for a counter-discourse to mainstream academic knowledge that allowed ‘the dominated, underdeveloped societies [to] articulate their own socio-political position on the basis of their own values and capacities’ (Fals-Borda 1987: 331, cited in Pietrykowski 2015).

The normative argument for engaged excellence stems from a recognition that knowledge is always a form of power and certain kinds of knowledge, and certain perspectives, are given more value and hold more power in society, and academia, than others. Therefore, we need to democratise knowledge in order to address this cognitive injustice. The Agora method, community–university engagement, and PAR are all ways to try to democratise knowledge.

3 What does engaged excellence mean for quality?

One of the four pillars of engaged excellence in the IDS strategy is the delivery of high-quality research. This report argues that high-quality research is dependent on it being engaged. This is because from an epistemological perspective, it will be more likely to have strong objectivity and represent diverse viewpoints; from a pragmatic perspective, it will be more likely to be recognisable and useful to users of that research; and from a normative perspective it will be more likely to democratise knowledge and recognise subaltern forms of knowledge. This challenges the assumption that high-quality research is that which achieves objective 'truth'.

Jasanoff makes the argument well when she challenges the idea of scientific 'truth'.

> Science, in the co-productionist framework, is understood as neither a simple reflection of the truth about nature nor an epiphenomenon of social and political interests. Rather, co-production is symmetrical in that it calls attention to the social dimensions of cognitive commitments and understandings, while at the same time underscoring the epistemic and material correlates of social formations. Co-production can therefore be seen as a critique of the realist ideology that persistently separates the domains of nature, facts, objectivity, reason and policy from those of culture, values, subjectivity, emotion and politics.
> (Jasanoff 2004a: 3)

A similar point is made by Funtowiczi and Ravetzi (2003), who state that

> invoking 'truth' as the goal of science is a distraction, or even a diversion from real tasks. A more relevant and robust guiding principle is quality, understood as a contextual property of scientific information… by bringing 'facts' and 'values' into a unified conception of problem solving in these areas, and by replacing 'truth' by 'quality' as its core evaluative concept. Its *principle of the plurality of legitimate perspectives on any problem* leads to a focus on dialogue, and on mutual respect and learning, wherever possible.
> (Funtowiczi and Ravetzi 2003: 1–3, emphasis added)

Quality, here, is understood as the principle of having a plurality of legitimate perspectives on a problem.

A further implication is that high-quality research is relevant and usable research. Dilling and Lemos (2011) argue that:

> [i]f usable science is indeed a goal, evaluating success in terms of usability and use may encourage science producers and users to engage in co-production. In this case, metrics need to also focus on other outcomes such as relationships with stakeholders, accessibility of knowledge, and especially, progress on specific societal outcomes.

There are some challenges within the current institutional systems in universities for adopting this understanding of quality.

> [T]he evaluation of research and of academic institutions… must recognise that changes in attitudes, behaviour, and policies may not be evident in short timescales. Incentives should reward academic faculty and corporate researchers for engaging substantively and well with the public and policy-makers. In short, an open knowledge system will require:
>
> - review processes that straddle and extend beyond traditional and disciplinary inputs;
> - broader and more complex but transparent metrics for evaluation, over timeframes that better reflect the processes of social learning and change;
> - procedures of validation to ensure that both methods and end applications of knowledge production are 'placed in context', considering both social and environmental aspects.
>
> (Cornell *et al*. 2013)

A further challenge to engaged research in relation to quality, is the difficulty in replicating methods. 'The plurality of methods used does... potentially compromise the notion of the reproducibility that is demanded by science, increasing the "costs" of method integration, and hamper communication within, and outside, the transdisciplinary research community' (Brandt *et al*. 2013: 5).

This can also be true when using a PAR approach. PAR activities 'are difficult to standardise… PAR is context-specific and fluid. As issues arise and relationships develop, the methods and activities conducted are necessarily dynamic, requiring adaptation and revision… better described than defined… PAR is context-centered' (Mackenzie *et al*. 2012: 13).

To conclude, the implications of engaged excellence are that research of excellent quality will need to be engaged insofar as it needs to bring together multiple perspectives on a problem – academic perspectives and practitioner perspectives. High-quality research will also need to be usable and it should engage with those it hopes will use the knowledge produced. However, how we define usable knowledge is not without problems, some of which are discussed in the following section on how we understand impact.

4 What does engaged excellence mean for how we understand impact?

The second pillar of engaged excellence is mobilising impact-orientated evidence. The implications of the epistemological, pragmatic and normative arguments made above are quite significant for how we understand the impact of research. Rather than impact being the outcome at the end of a research process, engaged research should have impact throughout the process. This is for two reasons.

First, if we accept the argument that science and society are in constant co-production, then the potential impact of research can be amplified if this is acknowledged and actually incorporated into the research through a transdisciplinary or PAR process that includes societal actors who may impact on or be impacted by that research.

Second, if we do undertake engaged research that involves multiple actors, particularly those who would be the users of the knowledge produced, the research is more likely to be relevant and useful to those actors *if they are part of the process*. This is a particular strength of a PAR approach, which adopts an iterative process that includes learning throughout the research, not just at the end.

This also has implications for our theory of '[h]ow is knowledge taken up in societies' (Jasanoff 2004b). We need to be alert to the fact that the way in which research is initiated, framed, represented and shared will affect who regards it as relevant to them. Cash *et al*. (2003: 8,088), argue that the effectiveness of mobilising knowledge for action decreased 'when stakeholders… saw themselves as excluded from relevant dialogues... Excluded parties often questioned the legitimacy of the information that emerged from the ensuing conversations, regardless of the information's salience or credibility.'

Therefore, how we 'mobilise knowledge' needs to change. Williams (2013: 232) argues that researchers within development studies need to

> re-evaluat[e] the role of the researcher. It is no longer sufficient to produce 'world-leading' academic articles in isolation: effective scholars, as imagined within impact evaluation practices, are also skilled in communicating their research to multiple audiences, and recognising, realising and evidencing the opportunities for their research to effect change in the wider world.

Researchers need to blur the lines between research and action in order to make their research useful and relevant (Benequista 2011).

Mason (2015) goes further and argues that we need to embrace transdisciplinary research in order to have significant impact. He calls for

> a shift in approach from the abstract to the practical, from ideas to action, or rather to *praxis*: ideas *in* action, thence generating more ideas to translate into fresh action and so on. In a parallel vein, transdisciplinary research moves beyond bridging divides within the academy, the project of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research, to engaging directly with the production and use of knowledge in wider society. (Mason 2015: 498)

We need to recognise that mobilising knowledge for impact is a political and negotiated process. This has been acknowledged by a body of work looking at the politics of policy processes, which challenges the divide between research and policy. Wehrens (2014), writing about public health, states that

> scholars have begun to criticize the analytical a priori separation of research, policy and practice domains that is characteristic for the two communities' conceptualization… Rather, what counts as a 'scientific' issue and what counts as a 'policy-affair' is often the subject of active negotiations... the boundaries between domains are never as clear-cut as they may appear, as they are negotiated in practice.
> (Wehrens 2014)

Policy processes are inherently political, and therefore will always involve a politics of knowledge that is subject to negotiation and debate (Keeley and Scoones 2003).

A PAR approach understands impact to be an integral part of the iterative research process; it is what the 'action' in PAR refers to. It is based on an assumption that

> [i]f research is a shared experience, the relationships that are established over time have the capacity to extend beyond the research findings and into spaces in which we can move beyond an exploration of what is, and into an exploration of what could be.
> (Wagaman and Sanchez 2015)

PAR engages participants (both academic researchers and practitioners) in self-reflection so that their actions can reflect the change they want to see (Pietrykowski 2015). The purpose of PAR is not only to produce knowledge for action, but also to produce knowledge *from* action (Nielson 2016).

In particular, a PAR process emphasises the importance of place-based knowledge and how that supports the sustainability of the research process. The argument is that 'home-grown community researchers… can continue to participate in community-based research after this particular project ends' (Pietrykowski 2015). Bensimon *et al*. (2004: 112) argue that PAR allowed them to 'conduct research that would be situated in and shaped by local communities and local individuals… [and allow] the institutions to incorporate the knowledge they had acquired into the local systems of decision making'.

This is supported by well-documented evidence that, according to Mackenzie *et al*. (2012: 12), the engagement of stakeholders in research has the following impacts:

- wider access to information, networking opportunities and resources including access to local knowledge about what is likely to work and what is not;
- improved decision-making and outcomes by enabling input by a wider range of stakeholders;
- better understanding by governments of the complex issues in communities and similarly, better understanding by stakeholders of the processes of government;
- opportunities for co-learning and reflection to build capacity to support current and future initiatives; and
- increased participants' ability to take part in productive dialogue on key issues.

Within the PAR literature, some authors heed the warning that there is always a risk with PAR, and other forms of engaged research, that the expectation of impact is not realised. Clark and Jasaw (2014: 519) call this 'the danger of participatory little-action research' and state that it can contribute to the disillusionment of participating researchers and practitioners.

Engagement with non-academic actors and stakeholders should not just be the preserve of researchers; students can also benefit from such engagement, and increase their understanding of how to apply what they are learning to 'real world' problems. Slade *et al*. (2015, cited in Porter *et al*. 2015: 414) state that:

> [s]tudents found learning from practitioners and other partners personally rewarding because they provided clear links between theory and real-world problems and issues, as well as providing examples and practice insights. They also felt that involvement… gave them a taste of being professional and making a worthwhile contribution, and a better understanding of the skills needed by planners in their work. Students believed they were better prepared to enter the workplace particularly because of the development of interpersonal skills.

Therefore, engaged excellence in teaching implies supporting experiential learning, through which students engage with partners in order to understand and apply their knowledge in real-world settings.

4.1 How do we measure impact?

As noted in Section 3, on quality, how we measure impact is a contested area. One implication of the pragmatic arguments made for engaged excellence, outlined in Section 2, is that high-quality research is usable research, so could we measure the impact of research based on how it is used? This is challenging, as use can be defined many ways.

Mackenzie *et al*. (2012: 19) highlight this dilemma in their discussion of what constitutes 'success' in a PAR project.

> Success for 'insiders' may be gauged by the extent that material improvements result from the work. By contrast, a successful project outcome from a researcher's perspective is more likely to be measured against the extent to which the work allows for an original contribution to a peer-reviewed body of scholarship.

Fazey *et al*. (2014: 206–7) argue that research can be assessed in terms of '(1) changes in understanding/attitudes; (2) changes in practice or policy; (3) actual impacts of changes in practices/policies; or (4) the quality of the research processes. The latter raises the question of how much emphasis we put on assessing process, or the "engagement" part, of engaged excellence.'

Evaluating the process of engaged research should be closely related to evaluating its impact (Molas-Gallart and Tang 2011). In particular, focusing on the process, we can try to understand *how* and *why* a process of engaged research has had impact (been used in some way), and how this relates to the approach and methods used (Fazey *et al*. 2014: 218).

Engaged research is complex and its impacts, and usability, might not be immediately obvious or linear, and there may be a long time lag (Phillipson *et al*. 2012). There is also the issue of our limited control over how and why our research is or is not used. The impact of an engaged research process will be influenced by 'powerful political, economic, social, cultural and institutional factors that affect longer term outcomes' (Fazey *et al*. 2014: 218).

Nowotny *et al*. (2003) argue that the implications of engaged research mean that 'traditional notions of "accountability" have had to be radically revised. The consequences (predictable and unintended) of new knowledge cannot be regarded as being "outside" the research process because problem solving environments influence topic-choice and research-design as well as end-uses' (2003: 187).

Some work has been done on trying to develop matrixes of impact that take these concerns into account. An Independent Review of the Role of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management was published in 2015, looking at the current trend towards quantitative matrixes within the UK Higher Education system. It proposed 'responsible metrics' to support the appropriate uses of quantitative indicators in the assessment of research. The authors (Wildsdon *et al*. 2015) proposed the following dimensions:

- robustness: basing metrics on the best possible data in terms of accuracy and scope;
- humility: recognising that quantitative evaluation should support – but not supplant – qualitative, expert assessment;
- transparency: keeping data collection and analytical processes open and transparent, so that those being evaluated can test and verify the results;
- diversity: accounting for variation by field, and using a range of indicators to reflect and support a plurality of research and researcher career paths across the system;
- reflexivity: recognising and anticipating the systemic and potential effects of indicators, and updating them in response.
  (Wildsdon *et al*. 2015: x)

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada has developed a framework for assessing the quality of its research that includes an understanding of impact that goes beyond traditional academic matrixes. It identifies four dimensions of quality: research integrity; research legitimacy; research importance; and positioning for use (Ofir *et al*. 2016: 10). The fourth dimension explicitly recognises that good-quality research should be usable research, but acknowledges that the uptake of research is a political process. It recommends 'careful consideration of relationships to establish before and/or during the research process, [and]… strategies to integrate potential users into the research process itself wherever this is feasible and desirable' (*ibid*.). This supports the argument made in this report, that research is far more likely to be usable (and to have impact), if the potential users of that research are engaged in the research process.

To conclude, the implications of engaged excellence are that impact happens throughout the research process and that the realms of 'research' and 'impact' should not be seen as separate. Impact is the responsibility of all involved in the research process, and we should seek to engage with those who we hope will use our research. We should support experiential learning, through which students engage with partners to understand and apply their knowledge in real-world settings. The process of research is as important as the outcome, and gaining an understanding of how and why a particular process has led to certain outcomes provides us with a better understanding of how knowledge is mobilised (often in non-linear ways). Assessing what constitutes impact or success, particularly when working in partnerships that are co-constructing knowledge, is a contested process. Different actors will have different perspectives on the 'success' of a research process, depending on where they are situated.

5 What does engaged excellence mean for the co-construction of knowledge?

The third pillar of engaged excellence is co-constructing knowledge. It is clear from the arguments made above, that the co-construction of knowledge needs to be a process of bringing together multiple kinds of knowledge and multiple perspectives to construct an understanding of a research phenomenon based on a plurality of situated knowledges.

As Nowotny *et al*. (2003: 187) argue,

> [t]he research process can no longer be characterized as an 'objective' investigation of the natural (or social) world, or as a cool and reductionist interrogation of arbitrarily defined 'others'. Instead, it has become a dialogic process, an intense (and perhaps endless) 'conversation' between research actors and research subjects.

5.1 What is co-construction?

As noted in Section 2.3.1, the co-construction of knowledge can enable research to include different perspectives and different forms of knowledge, thus potentially making it more representative and relevant to those who might use the knowledge produced. A good example of this can be found in Apgar's research (forthcoming), which has recognised the need to create 'space for all knowledge, including I[indigenous] K[knowledge]... [in order to] enable more sustainable resource management' (p. 3). She argues that sustainable resource management systems need to acknowledge and recognise socially embedded indigenous knowledge as being just as relevant and useful to local communities responsible for those systems, as scientific knowledge. Therefore, engaged research in this area must co-construct a shared understanding that builds on these different kinds of knowledge.

However, co-construction does not only happen when there are attempts to bring together indigenous and scientific knowledge. It also happens with attempts to bring together knowledge and experience from different spheres of society. Deliberative policy processes are being 'created, in increasing numbers, either when the authorities cannot see a way forward, or when they know that without a broad base of consensus, no policy can succeed. They are called "citizens' juries", "focus groups", "consensus conferences", or any one of a great variety of other names. Their forms and powers are correspondingly varied. But they all have one important element in common: they assess the quality of policy proposals, including a scientific element. They have proved their competence using the science they master during the exercise combined with their knowledge of their own situation in all its dimensions. And their verdicts all have some degree of moral force and hence political influence' (De Marchi and Ravetz 2001, cited in Funtowiczi and Ravetzi 2003: 7).

PAR approaches to research are another model for the co-construction of knowledge. Caxaj (2015: 9) argues that

> a PAR framework enabled necessary conversations and spaces by acknowledging differences in power and priorities between community members and the researcher, demanding a more flexible and democratic realization of research activities. In being community-informed and collaborative, research processes ensured more diverse, rigorous and accountable findings and understandings. Key to the success of these strategies was the building of relationships, the honouring of difference and epistemological pluralism, and a commitment to demonstrating accountability and reciprocity.

Teaching and learning can be a form of co-constructing knowledge. For Gibbons (2006: 7–8, cited in Erasmus 2007) ‘knowledge is contextualised as a result of the reverse communication that takes place when society speaks back to science’. Teaching that is based on reciprocity and mutuality, where constructive dialogue can take place, allows for students and teachers to co-construct knowledge and contextualise it.

Freirean pedagogy is explicitly based on a notion of co-construction of knowledge, namely ‘the notion that students possess their own stocks of knowledge and ways of understanding the world [and] are capable of creating new knowledge through indigenous modes of reflection, interpretation, analysis, synthesis, and critique’ (Pietrykowski 2015: 243). Therefore, engaged excellence in teaching should adopt a critical pedagogy that builds on students’ perspectives and experiences to co-construct meaningful knowledge. It should encourage reflexivity in both students and teachers, to help them understand that their knowledge is always situated and based on their positionality.

5.2 Challenges to co-constructing knowledge

In all engaged research processes there is a risk of co-option, which can fundamentally undermine the co-construction of knowledge. Jordan and Kapoor (2016: 135) argue that ‘participatory approaches to research are being co-opted by academic researchers... as a means to enhance forms of social regulation that support and sustain the social relations of neoliberal accumulation and the coloniality of power’. Mason (2015: 499) makes a similar argument, saying that PAR can never escape power relations, and when undertaken in an un-reflexive way, can ‘establish the dominance of researchers in a process and/or reinforce hierarchy in a participating group; [and] legitimise elite local knowledge’.

These arguments highlight the necessity for all those participating in the co-construction of knowledge to be reflexive and cognisant of power relations, including their own internalisation of power. We are often unaware of how we have internalised power and how this affects our relationships and attitudes; therefore, this requires specific reflective practices, facilitated by skilled practitioners, to support participants to be reflexive throughout the research process.

Brandt *et al*. (2013: 1–2) identify five challenges involved in co-construction: (1) lack of a coherent framing; (2) the integration of methods; (3) the research process and knowledge production; (4) practitioner engagement; and (5) generating impact.

Under the first challenge, we need to recognise that how a problem is framed will be a negotiated and political process. Who gets to choose what problem is identified, how it is defined, and what the research question is? This relates to the third challenge, as the research process will involve: (a) problem identification; (b) problem analysis; and (c) the integration and application of knowledge; and research varies as to the intensity of co-construction at each phase (Brandt *et al*. 2013). This has implications for who has influence over the research process and how knowledge is co-constructed in that process.

Muhammad *et al*. (2015) argue that the following will affect the extent to which multiple forms of knowledge are co-constructed:

1. the positionality of the researcher to the communities being researched and to their academic setting – the extent of privilege of identity (or identities) within societal norms and within the specific community and academic relationship;
2. the research process itself – who defines the research design, decision making processes, and levels of power sharing;
3. the representation and writing of the findings – whose voices are privileged and being heard; and
4. the epistemology of power – how power is exerted in the construction of knowledge. (2015: 1,049)

Further challenges to co-construction are: individual incentive structures within academia that discourage more participatory approaches (Fouché and Chubb 2016); disciplinary and sectoral silos within academia and institutions (Knapp and Trainor 2013: 1,301); different language and terminology used by academics and non-academics, and also between disciplines (Clark and Jasaw 2014: 512); timeframes and accountability matrixes that limit our flexibility (Mackenzie *et al*. 2012: 17); the complexity of managing multiple actors (*ibid*.); and the requirements of funders limiting our choice of partners (i.e. we can only work with those who meet certain criteria set by funders) (Williams 2013: 228).

5.3 Who should be co-constructing?

The co-construction of knowledge needs to be a process of bringing together multiple kinds of knowledge and multiple perspectives to construct an understanding of research phenomena based on a plurality of situated knowledges. But, how does one identify who can represent those multiple kinds of knowledge and perspectives? Sadler *et al*. (2012) pose important questions, asking who represents specific stakeholders or community members. They remind us that 'communities have diverse forms, and may be unified by common interests, lifestyles, religious affiliations, or activities, or by other common characteristics such as geography, environment, gender, or ethnicity. Indeed, people usually belong to multiple, overlapping communities' (*ibid*.: 465), so identifying who can represent a 'community' is not straightforward. Assuming a homogenous community can be represented in a process of engaged research ignores power relations, in particular gender relations (Guijit and Shar 1998), which may cause some forms of knowledge to be valued over others.

If all knowledge is situated, then research processes will always represent the perspectives of those involved, and the knowledge produced will be situated. That is not to say the findings of that research are not relevant for those outside the research process, but we need to recognise the inter-subjectivity of all research processes (Jasanoff 2004b) and be cognisant of the limitations of the co-construction of knowledge that involves representation of specific groups or communities.

5.4 Who owns knowledge in a co-construction process?

A key challenge when co-constructing knowledge is negotiating ownership and authorship of that knowledge. Castleden *et al*. (2010) discuss the different ways in which authorship can be understood when researchers are working with diverse community members. They argue that 'sharing authorship [can] require no writing at all; rather, if a community member had in some way contributed intellectually to the project, co-authorship was warranted' (Castleden *et al*. 2010). However, assuming that there is authorship just by virtue of participation can also be highly problematic, as they also acknowledge:

> When work is co-authored, it is assumed that the person, or community in this case, will verify the results. This leads to potential risks to credibility for both parties. A risk

> for communities as co-authors is that every community member may not be in agreement with what is stated in dissemination.
> (*ibid*.: 27)

Therefore, who the participants in a co-construction process are, how they are represented, who has ownership, and how authorship is dealt with are all important parts of the negotiated process, with clear ethical dimensions, particularly in relation to the risk that participants may be misrepresented and that knowledge may be misappropriated.

To conclude, the implications of engaged excellence are that the co-construction of knowledge will always involve power relations. There is rarely a neat fit between the interests and perspectives of those involved, and the co-construction process will often entail a politics of knowledge that will be messy and contested. However, triangulation between different perspectives and interests will provide a more realistic, honest and useful research process. Reflexivity on the part of all those involved is a necessity. Teaching should adopt a critical pedagogy that builds on students' perspectives and experiences to co-construct meaningful knowledge. It should encourage reflexivity in both students and teachers, to help them to understand how their position affects their situated knowledge and learning.

6 What does engaged excellence mean for partnerships?

The fourth pillar of engaged excellence is to build enduring partnerships, recognising their mutual interdependence. The term ‘partnership’ is used to cover a multitude of different arrangements, from sub-contracting a research partner, to agreeing a Memorandum of Understanding with another institution, or receiving a grant from a funding institution. The term partnership also has implicit implications of equality, but this may hide significant inequalities and power relations in the partnerships we forge. Given the arguments made above, what does this mean for building *enduring* partnerships, and recognising our *mutual interdependence* with those partners?

6.1 What kind of partnerships are needed for engaged excellence?

In order to support the other pillars of engaged excellence, a certain kind of partnership is required. If we believe that research of excellent quality needs to bring together multiple perspectives on a problem, and engage with the users of that research, we will need partnerships in order to do this. If we believe that engaged research should have impact throughout the process, and engage directly with those it seeks to influence, we will need partnerships. Finally, if we want to co-construct knowledge by bringing together multiple perspectives, we have to work in partnership. However, these partnerships will need particular characteristics.

As implied by the term ‘enduring’, we should be aiming to build durable, long-term and stable partnerships. Hoffman (2016) argues that this requires mutual respect, stating that when building partnerships, particularly with individuals and institutions outside academia, researchers

> must recognize the extent to which discourse is inherently a dialogue rather than a monologue, a conversation requiring mutual respect and appreciation for the expertise of all sides. In order to succeed, academics need to accept that they do not have a monopoly on knowledge and expertise, and that engagement is a two-way learning process.
> (Hoffman 2016: 86)

The term ‘mutual interdependence’ implies that we want our partnerships to be reciprocal. This does not necessarily mean equal, because it is important to acknowledge that very few of our partnerships will be truly equal. Unequal power relations make it difficult to forge enduring partnerships (Strier 2011: 83) and ‘even in efforts to do good, actors in and outside of the partnership may still be harmed by unjust – albeit often unintentional – abuses of power’ (Hutchins *et al*. 2013: 3,764).

However, it does mean that partnerships must be seen as relationships that both parties play an active role in shaping, and which is seen by both parties as being of benefit to them. Again, the need for mutual respect seems to be important.

Mutual interdependence also implies mutual accountability. Kajner *et al*. (2011) remind us that this means scholars need to

> think carefully about that for which they are accountable and those to whom they are accountable. These considerations are important when thinking about scholarly work with communities as well as when working with students and colleagues within the institution. When scholars enter into a shared ethical space and understand the concept of relational accountability, they respect and embrace multiple worldviews and increase both the quality and quantity of relationships.
> (Kajner *et al*. 2011: 267–8)

Partnerships are forged by people as well as institutions, and building enduring partnerships implies a specific skill set that researchers will need to have or develop. Cornell *et al*. (2013: 68) identify the following capabilities:

- humility to recognise the limitations of one's own knowledge and perspectives in dealing with complex systems;
- active inquiry and openness towards other systems of thought, disciplines and world views and other sources of knowledge and learning, both formal and informal;
- the ability to listen to others, being able to communicate in real, multi-way dialogues;
- a willingness to acknowledge that the partial knowledge that a researcher brings to the dialogue table will be transformed in the process, giving latitude to other contributors;
- procedural, facilitation and management skills;
- the enthusiasm and ability to share knowledge and learn, rather than impose knowledge.

Partnerships necessarily require negotiation, not just in the early stages of formation, but throughout. However, the principles of engaged excellence mean that negotiation needs to be undertaken in a reflexive way that respects and recognises the position, experience, knowledge and skills each party brings to the partnership.

In Section 5, on co-construction, the issue of ownership and authorship of co-constructed knowledge was discussed. This also has implications for partnerships. Mackenzie *et al*. (2012: 17) argue that clarity is needed throughout the life of a partnership about who owns the research process and the knowledge generated from it. This is something that has to be constantly discussed and negotiated.

Glover and Silka (2013) raise the important point that it matters who initiates a partnership. Because universities know the funding environment, it is often they who initiate partnerships with community organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), or policymakers, because they have accessed certain funds. The universities become gate-keepers to the funding, and this means they get to set the agenda in terms of research topic and outcomes, and as a consequence the 'limitations, bias and subtle power differentials in such partnerships, never surface' (Glover and Silka 2013: 46). Therefore, another characteristic of the kind of partnerships engaged excellence requires is one in which the politics of initiating partnerships is discussed up front.

6.2 How to choose who to partner with?

Having outlined some of the characteristics of the kinds of partnerships required for engaged excellence, the question of who we partner with arises. As discussed in Section 5, on co-construction, who we choose to work with, particularly when partners are 'representative' of particular communities or interests, is a political choice, and we need to be cognisant of this, selecting partners in a transparent and reflexive manner. If we return to the normative arguments for engaged excellence, there is a clear imperative to partner with those who represent marginalised and subaltern perspectives and whose knowledge is often overlooked in mainstream academic and policy discourses. Section 4, on impact, argued that we need to engage with those who we hope will use our work. This means that each research process will need to engage with different partners, depending on their intended audience: policymakers; a particular sector; other academics, the media; NGOs; community-based organisations, etc.

An interesting model of a partnership between academics and communities, which supports the pillars of engaged excellence, is the university–community partnership, discussed in Section 2.4, on pragmatic arguments for engaged excellence. Strier (2011: 94) argues that this 'may be a powerful vehicle for the construction of shared meanings, which are a basic condition for social action'. However, these partnerships are challenging, and 'depend on the capacity of the leaders to provide a learning and reflexive organizational culture and a participative organizational structure capable of making room for the supplementing, competing or even conflicting agendas embodied in these partnerships' (*ibid*.: 95). This kind of partnership requires mutual humility, respect and joint ownership (Cherwitz and Hartelius 2006, cited in Hikins and Cherwitz 2010).

Another type of partnership that can support this pillar of engaged excellence is student engagement with non-academic actors. This can be understood as 'the inclusion within the higher education curriculum of a period of time in which students work for some form of community-based organisation, to learn from the experience' (Bourner 2010). Bourner goes on to comment that 'a significant feature of student-community engagement is reciprocity, that is, the "give and take" involved'.

To conclude, the implications of engaged excellence are that enduring partnerships need to be based on reciprocity, mutual respect and accountability. Unequal power relations will always create challenges in building such partnerships, particularly where funding, incentives and interests create different and contradictory objectives for each party. Who we choose to partner with and why is a political and normative decision, and should be based on a recognition that representing subaltern knowledge and marginal perspectives not only strengthens research outcomes, but also contributes to democratising knowledge. We also need to choose to partner with those we hope will use our research.

7 Conclusion

This report has argued that to be of high quality, research must be engaged. This is based on epistemological arguments, ethical arguments and pragmatic arguments.

The epistemological argument for engaged excellence is therefore that because knowledge is situated and pluralistic, and because scientific knowledge is always co-produced with society, good-quality research needs to engage with multiple forms of knowledge, from multiple perspectives, and will often need to be transdisciplinary in nature. However, in order to do this effectively, engaged research processes must be alert to unequal power relations and how these affect the participation of those involved. In particular, academic researchers need to acknowledge their positionality, through reflexivity.

The pragmatic arguments for engaged excellence are that traditional forms of research have a problem of representation and ownership, and fail to address complex global problems. Therefore we need to ensure research represents diverse perspectives and is therefore recognisable and relevant to potential users of that research. We need to encourage collective ownership of the impact of research. Finally, we need to acknowledge that, often, transdisciplinary research may be required to address complex global problems.

The normative argument for engaged excellence stems from a recognition that knowledge is always a form of power and that certain kinds of knowledge, and certain perspectives, are given more value and hold more power in society, and academia, than others. Therefore, we need to democratise knowledge in order to address this cognitive injustice. The Agora method, community–university engagement, and PAR are all ways to try to democratise knowledge.

This report then outlined what these arguments mean for the four pillars of engaged excellence.

The implications for quality are that research will need to be engaged insofar as it needs to bring together multiple perspectives on a problem – disciplinary perspectives and practitioner perspectives. High-quality research will also need to be usable. However, how we define usable knowledge is not without problems, and is dependent on how we are positioned. High-quality research should engage with those it hopes will use the knowledge produced.

The implications for impact are that we need to acknowledge that impact happens throughout the research process. The realms of ‘research’ and ‘impact’ should not be seen as separate. Impact is the responsibility of all involved in the research process, and we should seek to engage with those who we hope will use our research. We should support experiential learning, through which students engage with partners to understand and apply their knowledge in real-world settings. The process of research is as important as the outcome, and gaining an understanding of how and why a particular process has led to certain outcomes provides us with a better understanding of how knowledge is mobilised (often in non-linear ways). Assessing what constitutes impact or success, particularly when working in partnerships that are co-constructing knowledge, is a contested process. Different actors will have different perspectives on the ‘success’ of a research process, depending on where they are situated.

The implications for the co-constriction of knowledge are that this process will always involve power relations. There is rarely a neat fit between the interests and perspectives of all those involved, and the co-construction process will often entail a politics of knowledge that will be messy and contested. However, triangulation between different perspectives and interests will provide a more realistic, honest and useful research process. Reflexivity on the part of all those involved is a necessity. Teaching should adopt a critical pedagogy that builds on

students' perspectives and experiences to co-construct meaningful knowledge. It should encourage reflexivity in both students and teachers, to help both of them understand how their position affects their situated knowledge and learning.

Finally, the implications for building enduring partnerships are that they need to be based on reciprocity, mutual respect and accountability. Unequal power relations will always create challenges in building such partnerships, particularly where funding, incentives and interests create different and contradictory objectives for each party. Who we chose to partner with and why is a political and normative decision, and should be based on a recognition that representing subaltern knowledge and marginal perspectives not only strengthens research outcomes, but also contributes to democratising knowledge. We also need to choose to partner with those we hope will use our research.

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