Engagement: knitting up the ravelled sleeve?

The poster aimed to explore the big questions around partnerships in public engagement and consider how, as public engagement researchers, we can draw these threads together and tie them in a strong knot that supports university research.

The poster focused on four areas of partnership working. We asked UWE researchers with experience of working with different partners to give us their questions, as provocations for conversations with conference participants. We then asked Engage 2013 delegates to contribute questions from their perspectives before they moved on.

The questions that delegates left us were:

Working with charitable & industrial partners
- When translating research into practice, how do you strike the right balance between what controlled research tells us works and what will actually work in real-world settings?
- Partnerships don’t have to centre on research; there are many other partnership opportunities
- How do we ensure equal relationships, e.g. with small community
- How as a student charity can we sustain partnerships with the public when we have a high yearly turnover?
- How can we encourage more action research that gives back to the partner something that is sustainable?
  ➢ Public engagement researchers could offer support focussed on long-term sustainability and maintaining egalitarian relationships.

Working with creative partnerships
- How can collaboration enhance creativity in public engagement activities?
- What specific benefits do collaborators draw from such creative encounters?
- Can public engagement activities feed back into research? Maybe inter-disciplinary collaborations? Go beyond engagement!
- What kind of creative research networks can engender and catalyse creative partnerships?
- Artists/creatives can get a new perspective on their practice – it’s a two-way process!
  ➢ Public engagement researchers could offer support focussed on clarifying cross-disciplinary understandings and perceptions in collaborative partnerships.

Working with non-academic organisations
- How do we persuade local authorities out of the ‘comfort zone’ of their institutional practices?
- What do we do when our work is seen as a threat or disruption to established practices?
- How do we make engagement mutually beneficial to the organisation and the public
- How do we convey what universities do?
- University ethics committees – an institutional barrier to student-community engagement. A reflection of the risk-averse higher education culture?
  ➢ Public engagement researchers could offer support focussed on developing mutual understanding and dialogue when partners are working in new areas and relationships.

Working with other partners
- Will universities’ admissions policies support widening participation work?
- What can we do for teachers so they will want to work with us? It is a struggle to engage them now.
- Why not pay your students for high-quality public engagement work? Not as an inducement but as a fair reward for their efforts?
  ➢ Public engagement researchers could offer support focussed on innovative strategies and participants in research.

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