

Everybody Knows: Engaged research and the changing role of the academic

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Summary:

The rise of the impact and engagement agendas has challenged the role of the academic, and particularly the relationship between the academic, knowledge and the wider public. In this article, we propose that, alongside the existing models of 'knowledge transfer' and 'knowledge exchange', academic engagement with external audiences can also be conceptualised as a multidimensional 'knowledge network'. We adopt a case study approach to explore and illustrate what such a knowledge network looks like in practice, and we consider the implications of thinking about university engagement activities in these terms, with particular emphasis on what it means for the shifting role of the academic.

Keywords: knowledge exchange; knowledge network; engagement; academic knowledge; linguistics; biblical studies; first world war.

Introduction

Around ten years ago in the UK, an increased emphasis began to be placed on engagement between universities and the wider world. Initially the focus was on knowledge transfer, a model of engagement with a long and distinguished history. James Stuart, for example, a Mathematician at Trinity College Cambridge, undertook a public lecture tour of Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield and Manchester in the Autumn of 1867 (Jones, 2009). Such efforts rest on three assumptions: first, that for the purposes of such activity, the world is divided into two: the academic who has the knowledge and the audience who does not; second, that academic knowledge is the valuable commodity in question; third, that the beneficiaries of the research are ignorant until educated by the academic (Williamson, Cloonan and Frith, 2011). The role of the academic becomes that of the communicator, breaking complex knowledge down into concepts that can be comprehended by an audience without specialist training. Much of this work has developed from the models of Science

Communication, which still can (although not always) assume that the expertise lies with the academic and that their knowledge is to be shared with a 'public' in the simplest terms possible. (Grossman, 2014, also discussed in Bauer, 2009).

Despite the kernel of truth in the assumption that knowledge is a valuable commodity, its potential to create truly beneficial engagement is mitigated by the larger, underlying conviction that the non-university audience is ignorant. At best this is presumptuous; at worst, it is counterproductive to the aims of knowledge transfer. The model needed to change, so knowledge transfer begat knowledge exchange. Here, the 'public' (whoever this term describes) possess expertise, like the academic. In 'Building an Engaged Future for UK Higher Education' (Duncan, Manners & Wilson, 2014), the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) explored the future of the Engaged University and concluded that Universities are moving away from a knowledge transfer model towards a knowledge exchange, or audience development, model. The report acknowledges that universities should be porous organisations that support a 'two-way flow of information – people and resources crossing permeable boundaries, integrating and connecting universities physically, digitally and intellectually to society' (Duncan, Manners & Wilson, 2014: 7). In this model, the academic becomes the bridge or conduit through which information flows both into and out of the academy.

Despite this change in emphasis, the NCCPE report still implicitly constructs engagement as involving two parties: the university and the public or partner organisation. The phrase 'two-way' is used repeatedly: 'Engagement is by definition a two-way process' (2014: 3); 'an Engaged University supports the two-way flow of information' (p. 9) 'genuine two-way engagement' (p. 23). Similarly, there is much emphasis on the word 'partnership': '[w]orking in partnership with the public to solve problems' (p. 3), 'an important starting point for high quality engagement is collaboration: for universities to work in partnership with other organisations' (p. 13). It must be acknowledged that the phrase 'two-way' is being used here to model the relationship from the point of view the university, and refers to the flow of information into and out of the university, rather than specifying the number of contacts with whom that information is being exchanged. Similarly, the word 'partnership' can, as the *OED* informs us, be used in business contexts to refer to 'an association of two or more people as partners for the running of a business', even if in cricketing or romantic contexts it signals a relationship between just two participants (*OED Online*, 2017). Nevertheless, the NCCPE report does not explore the idea that such activities may by their nature involve multiple partners. When the word 'network' is used, for example, it is typically a network of external partners, rather than a network to which the university belongs, as in 'The NCCPE has supported the development of the UK Community Partner Network, a network of community partner organisations keen to develop their work with universities' (2014: 12) or 'Community-led task forces, networks of interest groups and question hubs are established to shape the knowledge agenda in different areas' (p. 46).

Furthermore, despite an appreciation for the changing notions of expertise and authority that identify the importance of situated knowledge, the NCCPE report still

constructs engagement as a benefit primarily to the academy by defining those outside the University as non-experts. One of the three imperatives identified by the report indicates that ‘we engage because non-experts see problems, issues and solutions that experts miss. Participation increases the quality of academic work and the functioning of universities’ (2014: 5) This division into ‘experts’ and ‘non-experts’ implies that only certain kinds of expertise ‘count’. It can quickly lead to the kinds of ‘knowledge incompatibility’ discussed by Price (2015), where knowledge cannot be transferred or exchanged because of a disconnect between the types of expertise ratified by different institutions. Moreover, it again structures the engagement activity in terms of two groups of people: the experts and non-experts.

In this article, we shall argue that alongside ‘knowledge transfer’ and ‘knowledge exchange’, both of which continue to operate as valuable and appropriate forms of engagement for some projects, an additional form of collaborative activity must also be recognised and supported. This sort of academic engagement involves a ‘knowledge network’ that is fluid, responsive, and proactive, involving multi-party working relationships that develop and change organically as projects evolve (Hill, 1998). ‘Network’ in this context, like both ‘transfer’ and ‘exchange’ before it, can be both a noun and a verb. The ‘knowledge network’ is an abstraction, a map of the relationship between participants engaged in a project at any particular moment in time. From a more dynamic perspective, however, what these participants are doing is ‘knowledge networking’, that is coming together to construct and share knowledge of different types. When undertaking knowledge networking, the academic’s role inevitably becomes less fixed: she or he is still the expert in academic knowledge, but also functions variously as a trainer, validator, and connector of people.

In order to develop and illustrate this argument, we adopt a case study approach, drawing on our own experiences of working on three different university engagement projects. As such our methodology is personal and reflexive, albeit grounded in several years of discussion and reflection with other academics and external collaborators. We are therefore not able to make any kind of quantitative claim for the frequency of this type of activity or the representativeness of our experience. Nevertheless, it is our perception that what we describe here are not isolated examples, but will find resonance among many academics who work on engagement projects. For example, our observation that this type of activity is a much more fluid process than generally acknowledged chimes with this observation by Schlesinger, Selfe and Munro (2015), who undertook an auto-critical analysis of their own ethnographic study of a Scottish creative business support agency:

the official advocates of KE are strikingly incurious about what the experience of “doing” knowledge exchange might actually reveal. Our research practice strongly suggests that KE does not take the fondly imagined linear form of the arrow of knowledge moving in each – and opposite – direction. Rather, our

experience of undertaking such work in the cultural sector shows just how complex and unpredictable the process can be. (p. 69)

The phrase ‘knowledge exchange’ renders knowledge as an entity that can easily be passed backwards and forwards between interested parties; what Schlesinger, Selfe and Munro reveal is that neither knowledge itself, nor the process of communicating it, can be as neatly packaged as the phrase suggests.

We seek to illustrate an approach to engaged research in the Arts and Humanities that envisions the academic engaging in a complex series of dynamic interactions. These examples do not fit neatly into either one-way knowledge transfer or two-way knowledge exchange models. Indeed, they will show that the academic is not always contributing ‘knowledge’ *per se*, but leveraging some form of the capital embedded within the academy and their position of influence. Such capital can be social, cultural, or intellectual capital; it may take the form of an ‘authority’ validating knowledge. Regardless, it occurs in networked form, within a web of conversations and activities that lead to something that is greater than the sum of its parts. At its heart, however, this approach remains faithful to the core idea of audience development: enabling and encouraging those who engage with research to be part of this web on their own terms. It is our conviction that such networks of collaboration are essential to the continuation of research after the recognition of situated knowledge and to the evolution of the academy into a guild of interconnected researchers.

Case Study 1: Jane Hodson, ‘Language as Talisman’

I am by training a literary linguist, someone who applies analytical tools from the field of linguistics to literary texts in order to gain insight into how the style of the text works. For the last few years I have been working specifically on dialect representation in literary texts, and even more specifically on dialect representation in Romantic period literature. My central research argument is that attitudes towards language variation shift significantly between 1770 and 1830, and I aim to explore how that shift was both reflected in but also reinforced by literary texts that represent nonstandard varieties of language.

In 2009, near the beginning of this work, I was fortunate to receive an AHRC grant for my project ‘Dialect in British Fiction 1800-1836’ which explored 100 lesser-known novels written during this period. Although this was before such grants came with a compulsory ‘pathway to impact’, I was already interested in talking about my research to a wider audience, and acutely conscious that a set of obscure novels written 200 years ago may not be the best basis on which to do so. I therefore created a parallel project that aimed to interrogate some of the same issues – how non-standard varieties of English are represented in literary texts – but taking as its focus local material. To this end I formed a partnership with Sheffield Local Studies Library and Archives and undertook a small project to create a finding guide for local dialect material, ‘Sheffield Voices: 200 years of representing the Sheffield accent in writing’.

From this initial project, a set of interlinked follow-on projects have emerged over the last 7 years, which have seen me working with artists, folk singers, publishers, poets, community events, schools, cinemas, heritage groups and a literacy charity. The projects have frequently involved students on my level 3 undergraduate module 'Dialect in Film and Literature', creating opportunities for them to engage with wider audiences about research they have undertaken. Throughout the various projects I have undertaken, an important focus for me has been talking to a cross-section of people in South Yorkshire about their language variety and its representation in film and literature. Reflecting back on it, although the 'Sheffield Voices' project was originally formulated in opposition to 'Dialect in British Fiction 1800-1836', the insights I have gained through talking to diverse audiences about dialect representation has informed my thinking about my 'core' research. My thinking about what people mean when they talk of 'dialect' has, for example, shifted significantly.

Had I set out with a research agenda it is likely that I would started from the perspective of 'perceptual dialectology', a sub-discipline which aims to investigate how people think about language variation and the kinds of judgements that they make (see for example Preston, 1999). One staple of perceptual dialectology is the matched guise experiment, in which listeners are played a range of different voices and asked to rank them on the basis of such qualities as intelligence, competence, friendliness and trustworthiness. The findings from such studies are surprisingly consistent: across a wide range of languages, communities and situations, researchers have found that, on the basis of voice alone, listeners judge speakers of standard language varieties to be more competent, intelligent and ambitious than speakers of non-standard varieties (Giles and Coupland 2008: 38). Such studies are primarily conducted on spoken language and as such are not directly applicable to literature, but there is a subset which explore responses to written representation of nonstandard varieties (Jaffe and Walton, 2000).

So why did I not simply use these well-established methods to understand how Sheffield people think about the representation of their dialect? The answer is that at the time, and without giving the matter much thought, I was in knowledge transfer mode. Having undertaken a knowledge exchange project with the Sheffield Local Studies Library and Archives, where there had been a sharing of knowledge and expertise between myself and the librarians and archivists, I was now in possession of a narrative about the material we had identified, and I was keen to share that with the public. I therefore held a public talk at the Library, during which I presented some of my findings. This was a somewhat bumpy experience, because I drew an audience who – while perfectly polite – were keen to interrogate my findings and measure what I was saying about key Sheffield authors against their own knowledge. Had I been aware of it at the time, a salutary insight into what public lectures can look like from the point of view of the audience is provided by one of the dialect writers I spoke about, Tom Hague. In 1973 Hague, a miner and dialect poet, attended a lecture about the Sheffield dialect by one of my predecessors in my department, John Widdowson. The letter that he wrote to Widdowson after the lecture was found in the University archives by Hugh Escott:

Dear Sir,

I was privileged to attend your lecture at Totley Council School on Sept 19 I am a fifty-eight year old miner who has spoken dialect all my life and I must admit that I was pleasantly surprised. I went expecting to hear some middle class patronising, with the usual painful attempts to reproduce the local accent. Instead it was a most enjoyable experience to listen to someone with such evident first-hand knowledge. The point you made about the pronunciation of 'master' and 'plaster' was very interesting. Another instance is words such as 'cook' and 'look' etc. Since the war, there has been an increasing tendency for us to say 'cuk' and 'luk' but strangely, this does not apply to 'hook' and if referring to a person's profession one invariably says 'cook' in the old way. [...] (Hague, 1973, cited in Escott, 2014: 207)

What is notable about this letter is that although Hague had had previous negative experiences of being lectured at, Widdowson evidently earned his trust and respect. As a result, although the initial talk may have been framed as knowledge transfer, the interchange did not terminate with Hague gratefully taking receipt of the academic's knowledge. Instead, Hague expresses admiration of Widdowson's lecture and immediately shares his own observations with Widdowson. Towards the end of the letter he offers to send Widdowson some of his dialect poetry. The letter led to a productive communication between Widdowson and Hague, Hague's involvement in some of Widdowson's wider networks of public engagement, and ultimately the publication of a collection of poems and short stories by Hague. As Ryall discusses in the next section, in a case such as this the academic takes on a role that goes beyond that of disseminating knowledge, and becomes that of listener, validator and, in the end, enabler of the dissemination of other people's knowledge.

Had Hague attended my own first attempt at a public lecture, I suspect he would have found an example of the kind of middle class patronising which he disliked. What I had not thought through was the fact that, by definition, events of this type attract audiences who already have some interest in the topic in hand, and may have quite extensive knowledge too. Having got my public engagement career off to a bad start, I endeavoured to do better. A key breakthrough lay in realising that I was taking for granted that the material, and my approach to it, were inherently fascinating. I was starting from the position that I found my academic work interesting, the material was about the Sheffield dialect, so Sheffield people must be interested in my account. I was arriving in lectures and classrooms with very little sense of who I was talking to, what their existing level of knowledge was, or what they hoped to get out of the event. An opportunity to remedy this came when I was invited to join 'Language as Talisman', a project led by Kate Pahl, an academic who works on education and literacy and has extensive experience of working on co-produced projects. The project team included Cassie Limb, a mixed media artist who often undertakes

community art projects, and Deborah Bullivant, director of a literacy-based social enterprise, as well as teachers, social workers and creative writers. When I began to participate in this network, my approach to public engagement shifted significantly.

First, 'Language as Talisman' was framed in such a way that rather than being about the dissemination of academic knowledge to an audience, it was about working with a range of groups and audiences to better understand people's everyday intuitions about language. As our end-of-project website summarises it: "During this project, a wide range of people have participated in discussion, research, and creative activities, all focusing on their own language and their use of it in everyday life" (Language as Talisman, 2015). For example, I worked with Cassie to create a hands-on activity where people could create their favourite words in fluorescent sand. We were able to use this activity in a number of ways, including setting up a stand at events to draw families in and talk to them about their own language, and taking the activity into schools as the starting point for writing activities. Through this, I was able to share some of my own knowledge about language variation, at the same time as listening to their stories and experiences of language variation.

Second, our external partners on the project generously mediated access for me to groups I would have found it impossible to work with otherwise, and they helped me to fashion my activities in a way that would engage participants. For example, when we did our fluorescent sand activity in a particular park, Deborah was very insistent that I bring juice and biscuits. I did not immediately see the point of this as the activity had already gone very well in other settings. After sitting in chilly isolation for half an hour while people walked past, however, Deborah set off to the nearby skateboard ramp, and returned with a gaggle of young people who had agreed to do our art activity in return for refreshments. The activity had been put on a transactional basis: the provision of one form of capital (juice and biscuits) recognised that the young people were giving up another form of capital (their leisure time). Once engaged with the activity, many stayed to do more artwork and participate in free-flowing discussions, presumably because they felt that the activity had proven to be worth the continued investment of their time. As Strine discusses in section three, it may sound trivial but finding ways to acknowledge the capital that other parties are investing in the project and creating the right atmosphere can make or break a project with some groups, and academics are simply not equipped with this knowledge.

Thirdly, even from this short description of a small part of the overall project, it will be apparent that the network of participants in the project was far more complex than a simple expert/non-expert binary would suggest. Each participant – the academic, the director of a literacy social enterprise, the community artist, the young people in the park – chose to engage with the project because they had something to contribute to it, and because they hoped to get something out of it. Knowledge of different kinds circulated: lived knowledge of local speech and its uses, academic knowledge about language variation, artistic knowledge about how to deliver an activity, practical knowledge of how to engage particular groups, social knowledge about how to strike up a conversation. So too did

different kinds of capital: funding to undertake activities, time of participants, knowledge(s), university prestige, juice and biscuits.

Fourthly, working in this way shifted my role as an academic. If I had been undertaking a perceptual dialectology study, within the terms of my discipline I would have been the investigator and the people I was engaging with would have been informants. If I had been undertaking a more traditional knowledge transfer activity, I would have been the expert and the people I was engaging with have been my audience. But in this case, the roles of investigators, experts, informants, and recipients became much less clearly defined, and even within a single conversation I was sometimes the recipient of information, and sometimes its purveyor. I was working with a very mixed group of people, and my relationship with them shifted repeatedly as we moved through different stages of the project. My training as an academic never went away: I was always listening to what was said and evaluating it against my own understanding of the field, and at times I contributed my professional perspective to conversations. It was not my role, however, to offer a categorical 'expert' opinion whenever someone said something with which I disagreed. The position of the linguist in this kind of situation is complex. On the one hand, all language is data and linguists start from the position that their discipline is fundamentally descriptive rather than prescriptive. On the other hand, the general populace often holds highly prescriptive attitudes about language. To enable meaningful conversations to take place, I therefore sometimes had to receive ideas and explanations with which, as a linguist, I disagreed (this is a subject that Ryall discusses in more detail in relation to history in the next section). In the end, it was precisely this process of listening carefully to views that differed from my own academic training that ultimately shifted my understanding of what 'dialect' means to many people.

Finally, it is worth making that point that, even within this more dynamic account of the 'knowledge network', it was not the case that everyone had exactly the same status within the project, that there were no issues relating to power and control, or that the ethical aspects of this kind of project were always easy to manage. In many ways, such issues become more complex and demanding on a project of this type, a topic we shall return to in the conclusion.

Case Study 2: Amy Ryall - Academics and the First World War Centenary

For five years, I worked for Imperial War Museums (IWM) with the latter of those years overlapping with initial preparations for the First World War Centenary. I witnessed the conversations between historians, both from the Museum and from academia, about how to approach the centenary commemorations, particularly in the development of the new First World War gallery. In 2012, I moved to the University of Sheffield to work in external engagement but retained an interest in how the First World War Centenary worked with the academy on projects and initiatives. It is from this interest that this case study arises. I am interested in the notion of 'myth-busting' and whether it is a valid form of public engagement. I am also interested in how academics engage with a public who know

everything and nothing about the First World War, and how this engagement activity can be used to build a meaningful knowledge network utilising the experiences of all parties involved, going beyond knowledge exchange and having more impact than knowledge transfer. The position of the First World War in collective and familial memory with many of these memories lying outside of historical 'fact' makes it a challenging subject to work with. The conflict and its consequences occupy a very real position in people's family histories, and the lines between fact and fiction can and have become very blurred.

Despite collective memory and strong family connections, the context of activity around the First World War is still one where 37% of people surveyed in a front-end audience research report, commissioned by IWM in 2011 to inform the development of the First World War galleries, reported that they had only a basic knowledge of the First World War and 2% said they knew nothing at all (Slack, 2011). The report was conducted via surveys as well as face to face focus groups and telephone interviews and found that the top two answers to the question 'What do you associate with the First World War?' were 'trenches' and 'death' (ibid., 2011). Creating a knowledge network, where academic, public and museum work together is a formidable prospect given the fact that some audiences have a personal connection, some admit to little or no knowledge, and many have a very stereotypical knowledge of the First World War. The role of the academic historian in the First World War Centenary is both crucial and challenging.

There are several ways in which the knowledge network around the Centenary is being developed and promoted. Given that the aim of work around the Centenary is to inform and educate, IWM are an obvious organisation to lead the partnership group, *The First World War Centenary Partnership* (www.1914.org/partnership). This is a network for capturing and promoting activity and providing resources to organisations who are commemorating the First World War. Resources include those written by historians, both from within IWM and from academic institutions. In addition to the partnership and working alongside it, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) fund 'Engagement Centres'.¹ These are led by Universities and aimed at 'connecting academic and public histories...providing support for community projects...connecting projects with academic advisers, recommending archives and resources, advising on documenting and sharing research findings, co-ordinating training and events, promoting FWW centenary projects, sharing stories about the First World War, as well as supplying academic advisers for projects.'² Both aim to connect particularly with community groups through the Heritage Lottery Fund's 'First World War: then and now' community grants scheme.³

These partnerships and centres inform small numbers of an interested and involved public, but greater numbers of the public audience for First World War Centenary activity will connect with academic historians via the media or via IWM's First World War galleries. The extensive nature of the BBC's centenary season programming makes this an obvious example of a media response to the anniversary. Programming around the First World War will continue until 2018 by which time 130 newly commissioned programmes lasting over 2500 hours and including 600 hours of new content will have been broadcast over 20 BBC

television and radio stations (BBC World War One Centenary, 2013). There is also extensive content online, most of which is knowledge transfer. It relies on the notion that the role of the academic is to impart to the public their knowledge and understanding of the First World War, gleaned from many hours of study and thought about the conflict. This also assumes that the 'public' want their myths busted and their ideas challenged by 'experts'. The reality though, as acknowledged by IWM curator and historian Paul Cornish, is that 'the work of academic historians has traditionally had very little impact on British public perceptions of the First World War' (Cornish, 2016: 515). Despite this, BBC WW1 Centenary controller Adrian van Klaveren maintains that it is 'incumbent upon us to offer different interpretations of the war' (van Klaveren, 2013). In doing so, van Klaveren has gone for the 'big hitters', historians like Niall Ferguson and Max Hastings, who offer different models of dissemination.

Hastings' 'The Necessary War' programme⁴ works on a traditional model. Material is presented as authoritative; there are conversations in grand settings; he espouses his own view whilst seeking support from other historians who agree with him. It centres on the academic and the public consume the material anonymously. Ferguson's 'The Pity of War'⁵ attempts a slightly different model. In this programme, he sets out his interpretation which is then debated by a panel of academic historians and a studio audience. In terms of engagement, however, the historian is still paramount. Expertise is venerated and there is little sense that either the work of Hastings or Ferguson will change as a result of this public engagement. And why would it? The Centenary could be seen as an opportunity for historians working in the field to finally, publically, dispel the myths and legends that have surrounded the conflict for decades. To be fair, this is not what Ferguson, Hastings and others really do, but there is a sense that the BBC want to do this and by doing so, to reduce the nuanced arguments about the conflict to a neat, two-sided debate to enable the public to make up their mind once and for all.

As well as the partnership, and involvement in the Engagement Centres, IWM also have a greater role to play in how they display and interpret material about the First World War. They have attempted to do this in a very different way to the BBC, by engaging several prominent scholars on the advisory board of its new First World War gallery project with the aim of using them to inform the display and its interpretation, rather than to control it. These include David Reynolds (Cambridge), David Stevenson (LSE), Hew Strachan (then Oxford, now St Andrews), Deborah Thom (Cambridge) and Dan Todman (Queen Mary). Access to cutting-edge scholarship meant that they could very easily have slipped into myth-busting territory, confronting visitors with their historically accurate, well-researched content on the First World War, calling into question everything that the visitor knows and 'setting them straight.' Myth-busting is an aggressive business, and fortunately, the IWM team recognised the sensitivities around challenging the received collective memory of the First World War. Todman maintains that the role of the academic in public engagement is not about attempting to change people's ideas (Todman, personal communication, 18 September 2014). What IWM instead aim to do within the redeveloped galleries is to

encourage visitors to think about what they already know in a different way and to build on existing knowledge, to validate and extend it. They are creating a knowledge network, of museum, academic and public, which acknowledges and uses the knowledge, experience and histories that museum visitors bring with them when they come to IWM. Rather than trying to tell them that these are not valid, the display seeks to validate received wisdom, memory and history and encourage them to want to know more via a combination of museum and historical scholarship.

For example, common knowledge about trench warfare is that it is about artillery: big guns, shelling trenches in the manner of Baldrick's infamous poem, *The German Guns*. 'Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom' etc. (Blackadder Season 4, Episode 6, BBC, 2000). IWM does not shy away from this: 'Mother', the 9.2in Howitzer artillery gun, is still displayed prominently in the First World War galleries, a key part of the story of the First World War and an object that visitors can use to validate their own knowledge about the First World War, trench warfare and the way in which it was conducted. It serves to make them feel comfortable in the space (as far as that is possible in a display about conflict). (<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30025230>) The story is augmented though, by the inclusion of a display case full of trench clubs. Trench clubs are wooden-handled weapons, sometimes home-made, but often official issue, equipped with a variety of metal attachments designed to do a lot of damage to human flesh. (<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30001725>) It is very clear from these weapons that trench warfare was about hand-to-hand combat for at least some of the time. It was brutal, bloody and inhumane in a different way to shelling and is not an aspect of the conflict something that immediately springs to mind when people consider the notion of trench warfare. By introducing people to aspects of the First World War that they may not have thought about the display is devoid of the counterproductive judgement that it would be all too easy to slip into. By being aware of the existence of the knowledge network, acknowledging it and using it, historians and museums are better able to use what they know to influence how people see the history of the First World War.

It is this judgement that is so important when connecting members of the public with academics. Whether it is in the context of planning a museum display or the very real experience of working with a community group, the critical functions of a historian are vital for their craft. No one would suggest otherwise, but when engaging with the public, it is important to know when this critical function is unhelpful to the role of the academic. It is particularly important when working with community groups and those who have a specific story they want to tell. Validating people's historical experiences or honouring their memories is as important a function of academic involvement in any public engagement project (or project that involves public engagement) as it is to provide 'expert' knowledge. Sometimes this validation is more important and the key skill is knowing when to do what. There is much historical knowledge that is not and should not be in question and the academic historian of course, cannot be expected to ignore fundamental, damaging or offensive inaccuracies in knowledge, that are part of the agreed historical record. But the

validation of personal memory and knowledge builds confidence in working with academics and interacting with them on an equal footing. If the overall experience of engagement is positive and the understanding of the significance of events is not undermined, the knowledge network can begin to build.

As Todman acknowledges, pardoning men executed for cowardice during the First World War is historically suspect but at the same time it does not do anyone any harm. As a historian, acknowledging and supporting those whose family histories involve those men who were executed (or even those who believe that the pardon was the right course of action) does not fundamentally alter the historical record and may lead to insights into the human stories which surround these historical events (Todman, personal communication, 18 September 2014). The historian who launches into a critique of this point of view with a member of the public whose family has been affected by this issue will not be trusted and cannot learn anything from the interaction.

This role of the academic relies on the conviction that the 'public' does have expertise, wherever this expertise lies and whatever it involves. Clearly there are instances, some of them very obvious, where a historian would not validate inaccurate 'knowledge' but, as in Hodson's case study considering knowledge and belief about language, in many cases and in particular those which involve the public's personal knowledge and family history experiences of the First World War, it is not useful for the historian to condemn this knowledge as wrong.

People like to share their stories, memories, objects with others and academic honouring of these things is a crucial part of public engagement and building the knowledge network. This interaction with the public, where this public contributes on an equal footing with historian and museum to communicate what they know demonstrably improves the experience of all concerned. Both historian and museum learn what is important to the public, which in turn influences (if not fully shapes) their work in communicating history to their audiences. This is somewhat of a public relations exercise: academic historians have to prove that they are human beings, that they are not just concerned with facts and arguments, and must avoid a patronising approach that can come with being 'the expert'. It is by engaging with the public in this way that the historian's knowledge, both about their subject and about how 'the public' engage with it grows.

How people respond to history is as important as the history itself and by being open to this notion, ready to use what people know and share with them knowledge in a compassionate and thoughtful way, academics influence and change people's notions of the history they are dealing with. They can also have their own views challenged, whether about the subject matter itself or how to approach it. Building self confidence amongst an interested public, to the point where they feel able to share knowledge is an important part of stretching the public's knowledge beyond its existing state. It is an effective way of dealing with well-trodden histories and one which has been usefully employed in First World War Centenary activity.

There is clearly a place for the academic historian, presenting what they know in an authoritative manner during a lecture or television programme and in advising museums on their content. These sweeping overviews and the ‘big history’ are a key part of the Centenary commemorations but it is important that they do not constitute the whole picture. Working with individuals and groups who have their own knowledge of the First World War, both validating this knowledge and taking it into account as part of the knowledge network enhances understanding in ways that go beyond knowledge transfer and exchange. Building the knowledge network organically, through both formal and informal means, encouraging it through broadcasting, the AHRC Engagement Centres, museums and events is a positive development for public engagement. Public Engagement is not an exact science, much good work happens serendipitously, through a host of connections which make up these networks. By being aware of this and open to its possibilities, museums, events, histories and historians of the First World War stand to gain both in knowledge and experience which can only enhance their understanding of the conflict and how to study and communicate it.

Case Study 3: Casey Strine, ‘Back Where You Came From’

I am an ancient historian and a scholar of the Bible whose focus is on migration in the ancient world, especially ancient Israel. Therefore, despite the fact that people most commonly associate the Bible with power and privilege, I am generally concerned to explore how the collection of texts known as the Bible developed within ancient communities that were marginalised. Indeed, involuntary displacement was a crucial experience among the writers and ancient audiences for the Bible.

The New Testament, for example, depicts Jesus of Nazareth as an involuntary migrant (Matthew 2:13-15) and refers to Christians as exiles (*parepidēmos*; 1 Peter 1:1). Involuntary migration is even more prevalent in the Hebrew Bible – known to most as the Old Testament. Familiar books like Exodus, Isaiah, and Jeremiah along with less well known ones like Ezekiel, Daniel, Ruth, and Esther all deal with the experience of involuntary migration. Perhaps the best example, however, is the story in the Book of Genesis about the patriarchs of ancient Israel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

Abraham flees famine twice (Genesis 12 and 20), his son Isaac once (Genesis 26). Isaac’s son Jacob fears for his life, so he seeks asylum in a foreign land (Genesis 28). Joseph, one of Jacob’s sons, is a victim of human trafficking and sold into forced labour (Genesis 37). The female characters in Genesis experience involuntary migration too. Sarah and Rebekah both flee famines (with Abraham and Isaac respectively). These women engage in a form of sex work to provide for their families (Genesis 12, 20, 26). Hagar is ejected from her home and lives as a destitute involuntary migrant (Genesis 16, 21). If one adopted the terminology of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees terminology for Genesis’ characters, Abraham would be an environmentally induced, externally displaced person, Isaac an environmentally induced, internally displaced person, and Jacob an asylum seeker who

gains refugee status. This description of Genesis emphasises that interpretation of such texts should be informed by the experience of involuntary migration, but scholars have rarely pursued this line of inquiry.

It is important to underscore this research is not religiously motivated; rather, the stories in Genesis comprise an ancient text written by involuntary migrants to involuntary migrants, speaking about the experience of involuntary migration. In order to understand these texts better as an ancient historian who does not have any personal experience of involuntary migration, I recognised that I needed to find a way to read and discuss these stories with people who do have first-hand knowledge of this traumatic experience.

It is no simple task to conceive of a culturally sensitive and ethically responsible way to read these stories with involuntary migrants. These people – asylum seekers and refugees to the media and politicians, but sanctuary seekers in their own terms – live in precarious situations and understandably remain reticent to talk about their past experiences. To develop a robust method for reading texts likely to touch upon sensitive and emotional topics, I first collaborated with artist and art therapist Emilie Taylor. Taylor's socially engaged practice seeks to represent people's ideas and experiences of the places they inhabit. She works with the voice that already exists within specific communities, employing creativity to foster empowerment that develops communication skills. She brought a strong track record of successful projects with marginalised communities that offered the foundation for our approach.

Together, Taylor and I designed a project focused on evening meetings that occurred weekly for 12 weeks. Each meeting was given a structure designed to create a sense of trust and to allow for a gradual exploration of the sensitive topics in the stories about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their families in Genesis. The method borrowed from participatory action research (Colmenares, 2012; Fals Borda, 1999; Facer and Enright, 2016), previous art therapy done with involuntary migrants (Papadopoulos, 2002; Dokter, 1998), and collaborative efforts to produce contextualised interpretations of biblical texts (West, 1994; 2015). Still, Contextual Exegesis – the name we settled on for our method – is innovative because it uniquely combines aspects of these prior projects with a new insight about Genesis as an ancient text to produce fresh interpretations of these stories about involuntary migration.

The core of the project was, in the end, a series of ten meetings with a closed group of six sanctuary seekers cum artists. The meetings occurred in a location that was not part of the artists' regular activities. This created a sort of sacred space; a contained environment in which trust can build and people can safely hold their traumatic experiences so that they can explore them again (Waddell, 1998; 2002; Schaverein, 1999; Sandler, 2009). Sessions began with a meal, which allowed for informal discussion, the building of relationships, and a gradual transition into weightier topics. Next, I read a passage from Genesis and invited everyone to respond to the text in whatever way they felt appropriate. We had no prepared questions so that the discussion received its shape from the contributions of the sanctuary

seekers to as great an extent as possible (Rogers, 1989). After approximately 30 minutes of discussion, the group then transitioned to making art.

The art making had two aspects: one quick, immediate response method and one slow, extended reflection method. Participants made monoprints, a quick working medium that facilitates an immediate response to the text and discussion, which allows participants to express whatever they are thinking and feeling in the moment. Participants also made a ceramic bowl, which involves a slow, methodical process. A literal container, the ceramic bowl provides a vessel that serves as a metaphorical place where participants can contain traumatic memories and emotionally challenging thoughts that surface. At the end of about 60 minutes of making, the group cleaned the room and each individual's work was placed in a secure container dedicated to that person. This concluding process transitioned the group out of the weightier themes, creating a further sense of containment. It also allowed the artists to prepare to re-enter everyday life. Finally, our artists received a bus pass, which allowed them to travel to and from the sessions.

These physical and emotional movements ritualise the sessions (Bell, 1992), generating a sacred space that creates a frame in which participants develop trust and can begin to speak about their inner difficulties and vulnerabilities. This allows participants, over time, to explore difficult issues, to stay with the pain of their embodied knowledge of trauma, and ultimately to receive back that emotion in form that is more tolerable. In sum, the combination of insights from biblical studies, art therapy, psychology, participatory action research, and ritual studies employed in contextual exegesis fostered a collaboration between Taylor, these six people, and myself that empowered our involuntary migrant artists to stay with their painful experiences in a way that produced positive contributions to their human capabilities while also bringing about fresh interpretations of relevant biblical texts.

One artist remarked that the provision of a hot meal and travel expenses were a tangible financial benefit to them that simultaneously enabled them to engage in activities that made them feel valuable as a person. A second artist said 'it was good to end the day with a positive attitude which we get from the sessions' and another that the work 'kept my brain alive.' For yet another artist the sessions were 'a positive distraction from the harsh asylum system' that proved 'being disabled to do paid work is not inability to be productive.' Finally, one artist explained that 'I am developing both inwards and outwards' as a result of the project. Each one of these items serves as an example of a non-knowledge based benefit experienced by our participants, underscoring that the necessary condition for engagement is an equitable transfer of capital in its various forms.

To be sure, this work could be called knowledge exchange and knowledge did indeed transfer from one party to another: I learned from our sanctuary seekers' interpretations of Genesis, Taylor gained new knowledge about working with sanctuary seekers, and they learned new artistic methods. The term, in this sense, is perfectly adequate. And yet, it remains astonishingly reductionist for explaining the range of benefits experienced and the multi-direction way that knowledge was shared, created, and communicated in the project.

One way to highlight this is to describe just some of the outputs from our collaboration that would be considered ‘impact.’

The most obvious output meeting the criteria of impact was the exhibition of the work made by the artists in our project. For two weeks in June 2015, we curated an exhibition in central Sheffield. The exhibition presented the monoprints and ceramic bowls made by our artists, gallery statements they drafted, and the texts we read from Genesis. The exhibition attracted hundreds of visitors, ranging from members of parliament to local third sector leaders to faith community representatives to other sanctuary seekers. The show was specifically designed to draw a broad audience – some primarily interested in the issue of migration, others more likely to be engaged by the role of the Bible in the project. Most importantly, though, the exhibition was designed to provide a platform for our artists to make their own statement on the pressing social issue of migration while it also presented them as authoritative interpreters of the Bible, one of the most influential texts in the so-called Western canon of literature. To describe this as knowledge exchange, with its two-way connotations, hardly feels adequate to characterise an event in which sanctuary seekers shared knowledge with Taylor and me about their personal experiences, with political leaders about their experience of the immigration system, with faith leaders about the meaning of the Bible, and with the media about their impressions of Sheffield, just to name a few of its results.

A second so-called impact activity has been the opportunity for Taylor and me to share our work with academics, community leaders, and art therapists in other countries. Since the exhibition, Taylor and I have presented numerous times on the work, teaching others what we learned about the stories in Genesis, the contextual exegesis method we have developed, and the art our partners made. Among the outcomes, groups consisting of academics, community leaders, and art therapists in both Sweden and Ireland are now developing projects modelled on ours. Can such effects really be expressed adequately in the phrase knowledge exchange? To begin, whose knowledge has been transferred? At a minimum, it is Taylor’s, our artists’, mine, and the co-produced knowledge that resulted from our work together. Where and how to draw the lines between these various groups escapes me. Furthermore, is exchange really the proper term for the impact this sharing of knowledge has produced? Surely the transformation of other’s practice stretches beyond the semantic limits of the phrase knowledge exchange.

Finally, consider some of the non-university audiences that I have been invited to address on this topic. Since 2015, I have spoken with or written for the Houses of Parliament, the British and Foreign Bible Society, and various media outlets about our work. When I do so, I am speaking out of my own expertise as an ancient historian and biblical scholar, out of my collaboration with Taylor, out of the knowledge shared with me by our involuntary migrant artists, and from the range of conversations I had with people who attended the exhibition.

From design to completion, in all the various contexts in which I have presented the work we did in ‘Back Where You Came From’, I can hardly recall a time when I felt my work

was properly explained by either the concept of knowledge exchange or knowledge transfer. Rather, my experience is better represented by the image of a web that radiates out from a central activity. The epicentre has always been the group reading and art making sessions. Radiating out of that fully collaborative, creative, and constructive time of group work, the web reaches out in a range of different directions. One thread of the web, comprised of our exhibition, connected with that ill-conceived and vaguely-defined 'general public' so central to the impact agenda through the art and voice of the sanctuary seekers who worked with us. Another thread stretched into the art therapy community, generating a multi-dimensional conversation on how to use religious texts in such work, how to most productively engage with involuntary migrants, and how to foster greater collaboration between art therapists and academics. Yet another thread has woven its way into faith communities, who have continually expressed their desire to learn more about our artists' interpretations of their sacred texts, to see the art they created, and to think about how they might support people in such challenging circumstances. This is to say nothing of the potential for this work to influence other charities, discussions of migration policy, and perhaps the practice of socially engaged art.

In short, this experience defies description as either exchange or transfer, but reflects a network of groups interacting in a web of conversations that share, combine, and create knowledge in wholly unpredictable and often surprising ways.

Synthesis and Conclusion

In light of these three case studies, which relate a portion of our experience in public engagement, it is our conviction that when such work is done well and in a way that truly benefits all parties involved, one can identify networks of engagement that are fluid, responsive, and proactive. The academic either leads or participates in a multi-party working relationship that develops and changes as the work evolves. In short, the academic's role in public engagement will still be as an expert, but also as a trainer, validator, and connector of people.

To draw these various case studies together into a set of overarching observations, we want to offer five concluding points that arise from themes that run through our various experiences of public engagement.

Firstly, this model moves beyond both a unidirectional conveyance of information (knowledge transfer) and also a bi-directional exchange of expertise (knowledge exchange) to conceive of a multi-party network of relationships. Instead of speaking in terms of 'the University' and 'the public' as two entities in a binary liaison, this approach is capacious enough to allow for multiple figures employed by a University (academic and non-academic staff, for instance) and a range of people representing the numerous 'publics' with whom one might engage. Although not as simple as the two-party interaction, its flexibility and its ability to account for the involvement of multiple groups allows it to escape the reductionist problem of two-party engagement that must always struggle to define 'public' as a single entity in way that adequately represents its various roles. Rather, this understanding of

engagement foregrounds, even encourages, recognising that many groups – including academics – participate in the process.

Second, successful engaged research flows from a conviction that knowledge is located beyond the University, situated in lived experience contained by people who do and do not understand what they possess. Postmodern epistemology highlights that knowledge is embodied and perspectival. Indeed, the popular tendency to ‘crowdsource’ answers is simply a manifestation of the idea that knowledge lies with people in general, not just documented experts. From a University perspective, this epistemology demands acknowledge that knowledge lies not only in libraries, archives, and academics’ brains, but also among ‘the public’ in its broadest possible sense. Stipulating that the identification and creation of new knowledge defines research, then accessing it – including where it lies outside of the University – comprises – a fundamental role of the researcher.

Third, arising from the preceding point, one can see that an academic’s role in this network will be complex, containing a range of responsibilities suited to engaging with people outside the University. The academic remains a subject matter expert – not only in their discipline, but in the process of doing research too. Yet, this model of engagement stresses that different and complementary forms of expertise lie with the other participants. Engagement employs multiple experts, not a single expert and a number of dilettantes. Multi-party collaboration presumes an equality of expertise without denying that it will appear in sometimes vastly different forms among the group. In this context, the role of the academic will be to cultivate the sharing of knowledge, the development of new ideas, and the creation of innovative outputs.

For instance, the All Our Stories programme⁶ evaluation describes the academics’ contributions as archive indexing, archaeological techniques, and 3D printing as significant, specific academic ‘knowledge’. This does not sound at all like a Research Excellence Framework Impact Case Study; yet, in functioning as trainer, validator, and facilitator, the academic enables oneself to navigate the potential of ‘knowledge incompatibility’ (Price, 2015) impeding the collaboration because it is far more than some subject matter expertise that the academic brings to the work.

Fourth, as a result of this new context, academics must reckon with the reality that the focus will not be on absolute accuracy on all things, for some issues and ideas will be extraneous to the extent that labouring over them will compromise the group’s ability to accomplish its primary aims. At times, the academic will choose to validate some of the knowledge participants while choosing not to invalidate and correct other ‘knowledge’ that may not be entirely accurate. There is an analogy to teaching here, in which good pedagogy often must accept an explanation of things that those who are not yet subject matter experts can grasp to do the near term work, albeit in the hope that over time there may be an opportunity to refine aspects of the other’s understanding for greater accuracy. The non-negotiable principle in public engagement will be that knowledge lies with all participants, who bring expertise rooted in their life experience. The negotiable question of

implementation will necessitate contextualised decisions on when not to validate contributions from participants because they are not entirely, or even partially, accurate.

Fifth, this model requires that each party in the multi-party network benefit from the work while it also acknowledges that benefit may take on substantially different forms for each party. The value of the work, in other words, will differ for each party. For instance, in Hodson's engaged literacy work, the parents of the schoolchildren she worked with valued the interaction between the University academic and their kids for how it raised their aspirations, not for any specific knowledge it imparted. Likewise, Strine's case study indicated that participants often value a tangible benefit (food, bus passes) primarily, but also appreciate how it facilitated the accrual of a further value (the opportunity to think and reflect with a clear head). In the place of measuring the productivity of engagement by the knowledge each party accrues, the purely instrumental measureable impact recorded, or the so-called change in practices of participants, we contend that it is necessary to ask and to identify whether there has been an equitable transfer of capital to all parties. Such capital may be intellectual, social, cultural, and, yes, even financial. It will, however, always be a currency that the party themselves has defined as valuable and identified as creating benefit for them.

By breaking free from a model of engagements based on either transfer (one-way dissemination) or exchange (two-way swapping), we open up space that allows people to conceive of projects that involve a range of parties in a working relationship that seeks to provide value, in its myriad forms, to all involved. This is a model for engagement that will enable academics to reconceive their involvement in public engagement, think in innovative ways about their various roles in such work, creatively employ the range of resources they can access in order to provide benefit to various parties, and, by doing so, generate an atmosphere in which academics and non-academics alike can feel happy with their contribution, positive about the knowledge they shared and gained, and valued as holders of situated knowledge. That is a method for public engagement in the Arts and Humanities that can respond to the 21st century context that recognises valuable knowledge is distributed throughout the society.

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<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/research/fundedthemesandprogrammes/worldwaroneanditslegacy/worldwaroneengagementcentres/> accessed 24/11/16.

Note:

¹ <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/research/fundedthemesandprogrammes/worldwaroneanditslegacy/worldwaroneengagementcentres/>.

² AHRC World War One Engagement Centres (n.d), retrieved from <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/research/fundedthemesandprogrammes/worldwaroneanditslegacy/worldwaroneengagementcentres/>.

³ <https://www.hlf.org/looking-funding/our-grant-programmes/first-world-war-then-and-now>.

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aU1HzdhEPbw>.

⁵ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01nl00x>.

⁶ All Our Stories was run by the Heritage Lottery Fund and supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.