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Locating and building knowledges outside of the academy: Approaches to engaged teaching at the University of Sheffield

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Abstract: This article draws on three case studies, which illuminate a number of practical, ethical and intellectual issues that arise from ‘engaged’ teaching activities within the curriculum. Projects from the disciplines of Architecture, English and Journalism Studies illustrate the possibilities offered by learning and teaching projects which emphasise public facing, co-produced knowledge as central components. It is argued that such approaches enable dynamic forms of learning to emerge, which work to expand the parameters of subject-specific knowledge while enabling the development of citizenship attributes and employability skills amongst students in ways that deepen, rather than dilute, intellectual rigor. The article locates these practical pedagogical reflections within theoretical frameworks offered by those working (largely in North America) on publicly engaged approaches to scholarship, and seeks to draw connections with contemporary developments in learning and teaching in the UK.

Keywords: Civic university, social justice, engaged scholarship, co-production, partnership working

Introduction

This article draws on recent learning and teaching projects across a range of disciplines to reflect on the ways in which public engagement might be integrated into the curriculum. We propose that apparent tensions between academic and practical value can be reconciled through meaningful and mutually beneficial collaborations between external partners, students and academics.

Each of the cases discussed here work with notions of co-production, and highlight particular ethical, and practical issues associated with this methodological approach to building knowledge. We would argue that teaching is enhanced through including ‘experiential expertise’ which may highlight hitherto neglected questions, whilst also contributing to building democracy and civil society (Ostrander 2004). Drawing on the Aristotelian concept, *Phrónêsis*, which can be understood as the design of problem-solving actions crucially through collaborative knowledge construction with those who have a legitimate stake in the concern, these projects contrast and integrate a number of different knowledge systems. (Greenwood, 2008) Professional knowledges are combined with ‘local’ knowledges, theoretical knowledges and knowledges that are about acting or practices of the city. This presents opportunities for students to develop other ways of learning, and approaching their subjects.

The case studies presented seek to offer transferrable points of guidance for those interested in understanding and applying their disciplines in public-facing contexts (Boyer 1996), and how the understandings of the ‘civic university’ in the UK might be augmented by a more thorough exploration of the pedagogical possibilities for this form of engagement (Goddard 2009).

We recognise the differences in approach to the three projects. The case studies are embedded into the curriculum of three very different disciplines, however the fundamental aim of engaging students with the City of Sheffield as an important part of their learning draws the three together. In reflecting on our experiences of facilitating these projects, we consider a number of learning points, including:

- Some ethical and pragmatic issues and opportunities that arise from establishing links with parties outside of the University;
- The potential for ‘transformative’ experiences for students and partners; the generation of multiple epistemologies of value, which might transcend stated and easily definable learning outcomes;
- The privileging of existing and co-production of new networks of knowledge and expertise, and, the benefits of acknowledging this;
- The holistic approach to academic advancement and developing notions of citizenship;
- The means by which discourses around employability and enterprise can be understood and re-imagined in the context of such embedded public engagement activities.

The main argument that emerges from these five areas is that engaged teaching is potentially a powerful way of learning, if carefully and rigorously developed between partners. The work undertaken in the course of this article is therefore designed to augment the emerging pedagogy of ‘engaged scholarship’. While the principles of ‘engaged’ scholarship (Schön 1996) and ‘service learning’ (Bringle and Hatcher 1996) are well trodden, there is space to explore the emergence of practices in learning and teaching which move beyond transactional relationships between student and publics. An emphasis on ‘public good’ and its apparent relationship with civic engagement, also explored by Goddard (2009) and Calhoun (2006), should then be understood in relation to understandings of the ethics of engagement and co-production (Durose, Beebeejaun, Rees, Richardson and Richardson 2013) and in terms of the pursuit of the employability agenda (Collini 2012). Scholarship has emerged which explores the relationship between universities and the wider environment in research and knowledge exchanges discourses of engagement (Lebeau and Bennion), as well as material from the United States (Boyer 1995, Checkoway 2001, Barker 2004) that has developed themes and principles of engagement over the last two decades. These broad, thematic and ‘big picture’ understandings of public engagement have been strengthened in recent years by the emergence of an internationalised civic discourse developed through the Talloires Network (2005 and 2009). This global set of perspectives converges substantially in the recent work of Watson, Hollister, Stroud and Babcock (2011). This article addresses a clear need to reflect more precisely on the pedagogical (rather than scholarly, institutional, organisational and ideological) possibilities and challenges associated with the concept.

This paper sets out three cases of ‘engaged scholarship’, in partnership with the University of Sheffield (TUoS), each of which test different pedagogical approaches within particular disciplines. The University currently identifies ‘Engaged Learning and Teaching’ as an institutional priority and directs resources accordingly, but it is important to state these projects have emerged well before this strategic emphasis and are rooted in discipline-specific contexts. The first case employs architectural methodologies, the second storytelling, and the third a journalistic approach to engagement. We acknowledge that these examples sit along a broad spectrum of ‘engaged scholarship’, with quite different approaches, but this enables us to offer insights into what methods might be appropriate to a particular discipline, and what ethical questions arise from working in these different ways. Each case engages in questions of co-production, which include, questions of, what it means to make public issues of concern with those who are affected by them; how

involving a multiplicity of voices might give us an insight into the histories of our cities; and how can people shape the places that matter to them.

Designing frameworks for engagement: The architect-activist as mediator

Case Study 1 examines partnership work between TUoS and the Portland Works (PW). It involves a number of University departments in the Social Science and Arts and Humanities, working with an organisation to collaboratively develop a vision for its future, *as part of the students' core curriculum*.

The civic partner: Portland Works is a historically and socially significant Cutlery Works still in use for its intended purpose of metalworking since its construction in 1878. Under threat from speculative redevelopment, the landlord intended to close the Works, evict the tenants and convert it into flats, which would have led to the loss of around 30 specialist businesses. A campaign, led by tenants and activists, to retain it as a place of manufacturing and making, led to its purchase by over 500 people in early 2013 and on-going development for community benefit.

Author: Julia Udall, Director of PW IPS & Design Tutor, Sheffield School of Architecture (SSoA).

Scoping the project

A Fast-Track Knowledge Transfer[i] investigating models of management and ownership to “*understand the strategies and tactics available to communities to safeguard their assets and to develop more equitable and just futures*” (Cerulli & Udall, 2011) took place in 2010. This intense and punctual research enabled the development of a formal relationship between Portland Works and TUoS, and the establishment of a framework for co-production. A number of projects stemmed from this, in partnership with the School of English, the Department of History, the School of Architecture and the Department of Town and Regional Planning, each ranging in scale and length with a brief appropriate to the particular course. My unique situation in this case, as being a representative of both the Portland Works and SSoA, lead to a strong desire to foster reciprocal relationships, and gave me an insight into the structures and capacities of each organisation. In this article I seek to explore how such projects may effectively be structured and the kinds of relationships that are required in order to make these partnerships successful.

Pedagogical Approach: Craftsmanship, Phrónêsis and the activist designer

The pedagogical approach which spanned each project takes much from the innovative ‘Live Projects’ programme based at SSoA [ii], which ‘...reject the separation between real and theoretical, practice and education...’(Chiles and Till 2005). Architectural methods such as creating briefs, using visual representation, combining detailed and large-scale study, being ‘propositional’ and facilitating relational practices such as ‘client meetings’ and participatory techniques are central to each partnership.

In exploring what public engagement might mean in this particular situation of a metalwork factory, I have been interested in the notions of craftsmanship as an ‘engaged’ and collaborative way of building knowledge (Sennet, 2008). These ideas of ‘communities of learning’ (Frayling 2011) are coming under renewed scrutiny, and draw on the concept of Phrónêsis,

“Phrónêsis (involves)...the contrasting and integration of many kinds of knowledge systems, the linking of the general and the particular through action and analysis, and the collaborative design of both the goals and the actions aimed at achieving them. It is a practice that is deployed in groups in which all the stakeholders, research experts and local collaborators have legitimate knowledge claims and rights to determine the outcome.” (Greenwood 2008)

By valorising collaborative knowledge production and the creation of distributed agency, where many people can act within a broader framework, we also assert the unique contribution of public engagement to the university curriculum.

Collaborative brief design

It was essential that we balanced ‘usefulness’ for the community partner whilst retaining academic value for students. In order to address this each project brief was written collaboratively between PW as ‘client’, and the relevant university course leader. This position is crucial for any co-production methodology; in order to avoid exploitation by either party, partners’ aims should be made explicit at the outset. By working together from the beginning, tutors were also able to integrate projects into the curriculum, providing appropriate support through seminars and lectures.

Participants, from PW and TUoS, took on roles of teaching and learning at different points of the project- through sharing information, stories, skills, or approaches. The motivation for this stems in part from an ethical concern with creating situated and genuinely collaborative exchanges. In *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire argues that collective knowledge building, where people work together to understand problems or concerns, is a potentially counter-hegemonic approach to knowledge construction, and may enable the majority or more powerful interests to be challenged,

‘Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information. It is a learning situation in which the cognizable object (far from being the end of the cognitive act) intermediates the cognitive actors - teacher on the one hand and students on the other. Accordingly, the practice of problem-posing education first of all demands a resolution of the teacher-student contradiction.’ (Freire 2000)

Universities frequently frame public engagement projects as ‘doing good’ for partner organisations without explicitly acknowledging the ‘good’ partners contribute to the university. By being explicit that collaboration was ‘co-learning’, we encouraged students to reflect on this and think critically about how, and from whom they learn.

Physically and socially engaged working

In each case, whether for a day, or weeks at a time, students were on site, and a social part of the wider campaign, joining in meetings, events and conversations. Spaces, materials, and practices were brought to the forefront, influencing the students’ approach. They developed a more nuanced understanding of the resources, capacities and potentials of their student group, and the wider client and campaign groups. Throughout, the students were required to be critical and deal with complex and contingent situations. Because they had to

negotiate with a client group made up of people with different opinions, visions and values rather than a project that was defined from the beginning, and didn't change and respond. Many of the Masters courses involved large international contingents who brought with them different experiences, interpretations and ways of learning that could be inspiring and challenging both to tutors and community partners. Often the process of getting to know one another provided an important part of the learning.

Figure 1: MArch Architecture Live Project Scale Model of Portland Works

A range of outcomes

Some work produced in these partnerships responded to a particular concern or issue, such as developing an audit of small-scale industry in the area and the relationships (material, social, trade) between makers. Others, such as urban design schemes for the conservation area, which were exhibited in the local community forum, were more speculative, inviting people to rethink part their neighbourhood with which they were familiar. Some, such as the beautifully crafted drawings of makers using the tools and machinery in Portland Works, initially conceived for the purpose of showing the Planning Department that there were important listed fixtures on site, were appropriated as posters for open days on site informing visitors about practices and skills. The students understood their work's success in terms of its usefulness for the campaign; if a drawing or report could be submitted to the Planning Department to bolster an argument, or a short film of a metalworker was shared on the PW website they could understand their learning and skills as contributing to change.

Problem-finding and remaining open

Learning outcomes for each project were developed that were dependent on the students critically evaluating their work, rather than solely the potential 'success' of the project, which was contingent and not entirely within the control of the students or supervisors. Drawing on ideas of Collaborative Inquiry (Heron and Reason, 2006), the process of critical review is reliant on the opportunity for cycles of action and reflection, between client and students and tutors; each is required to enter into a process of appraising their own work at stages in the project and crucially in the case of the students, as part of their accredited outcomes. This emphasis enabled students to take risks in framing their work, supporting experimentation and fostering originality.

Women of Steel: Value & academic rigour; from the classroom to the city

Case Study 2 involves five third year English literature students working closely with three women in their late 80s who worked as steel workers during World War Two. The students made a moving 25 minute film documenting their conversations with the women, which was *screened in a local independent cinema, and at Sheffield Town Hall as part of the city's 'International Women's Day' celebrations in 2011. The project was part of the Storying Sheffield module, which sees English students working alongside members of the public who come from disadvantaged social backgrounds.*

Author: David Forrest, Tutor; School of English

In addition to its focus on public engagement and widening participation, Storying Sheffield is a module that is underpinned by a number of discipline-specific theoretical areas, namely an emphasis on narratives of everyday life and on representations and theories of space and

place (Stone 2011). More broadly, the module is founded on a belief in the importance of privileging forms of knowledge and expertise that might be located outside of the academy (and the traditional boundaries of an English Literature degree) and that can be enlivened through public engagement (Calhoun 2006). Students take these ideas outside of the seminar room and into the city, facilitating a student-led scholarship of engagement (Boyer 1996; Barker 2004). In order to realise this aspiration, pedagogical strategies must be aligned with a practical focus on the mechanisms of public engagement and this may include the development of alternative means of research and dissemination. As the recent ‘Connected Communities’ (Durose et al, 2013) paper highlights,

“Whilst text is a dominant part of academic research - vital for the production, measurement and dissemination of research findings and unavoidable in ensuring critical debate, validation and accountability - extensive research has suggested that a reliance on text can exacerbate the exclusion felt by communities in research process...”

More specifically, effective and transparent partnerships between Higher Education Institutions and public partners are an essential prerequisite for community-based learning in the curriculum (Lebeau and Bennion 2012). In this case, the broad aims of the Storying Sheffield project and our growing prominence locally^[ii] led to Sheffield City Council approaching us as an academic partner. Our pedagogical focus on storytelling, community and place identified the project as an ideal collaborator in helping them to meet their broader aim to recognise the contribution of the women of Sheffield to the country’s steel industry during WWII.

One of Sheffield’s local newspapers, the Sheffield Star, had been leading a campaign to have the women recognised for their efforts during the war. We suggested to council representatives some of the ways in which our students might contribute, deciding that the students and the women would meet and that the meeting would be recorded, with objects and articles from the local archive used to stimulate conversations.

Figure 2: English Students meet with the Women of Steel.

This negotiation led to a key learning point – while we were aware of what the Council wanted out of the partnership, we had to keep in mind our own priorities: that any proposed activity would enable the students to develop the academic areas of focus and interest identified under the wider auspices of Storying Sheffield project. The students were not studying for a History degree, but were students of English; we were therefore interested in the students exploring the nature of conversation as a narrative mechanism.

We were keen for the students to explore the way in which dominant stories (the experience of war) could function alongside fragments of everyday life – situating the women’s narrative experience not only in terms of their wartime labour but within a wider conversation and understanding of their experience of life in Sheffield (Stone 2011, 177; De Certeau 1984, 93). Thus, in seeking to work on a public engagement project of this nature it is important that the brief is sensitive to the needs of the student; the partner; and the academic - that it reflects stated disciplinary interests. As the project began, the students surpassed our expectations. Having met the women for the first time in December 2010, the

students decided that they wanted to meet them again, to film their conversations and to construct a visual narrative that reflected the nature of their encounters with the women.

In the module, students record the processes and experiences of their learning in reflective journals, before submitting a larger summative report at its conclusion. This assessment model enables the students to take greater control of their learning experiences, and, when allied with an emotive, engagement project, such as the one offered by Women of Steel, it is a formula which enables a degree of academic exploration which can sometimes be lacking in more orthodox modes of assessment. The reflection on 'doing' - what Schön calls 'reflection on action' (Schön 1995, 30) - sees the creative element (the making of the film) as a vehicle to establish a tangible product through which the students involved are encouraged to derive individual points of learning based around their own, burgeoning academic interests. These inherent opportunities for knowledge production should of course be sufficiently organised within a set of learning outcomes that are malleable enough to be responsive to the dynamics of public engagement, while maintaining alignment to the programme structures (Biggs 1999, Reaburn et al. 2009)

The learning journals are a space for students to situate and record their application of complex theoretical principles through tangible experiences. Public engagement here is academically rigorous precisely because of its public focus – orthodox academic material is given currency by its deployment in the context of a human interaction. In what Boyer calls 'moving from theory to practice, and from practice back to theory' (which) in fact makes theory more authentic' (Boyer 1996, 17) – we identify how public engagement might respond to conventional pedagogical challenges.

Here students engage actively with public partners, testing their ideas in the public arena and reflecting on their academic development while producing work for a wide audience and with a specifically public focus. As researchers, we focus on the impact of our work, but for students, understanding the relationship between knowledge production and the wider, public environment can be equally, if not more, valuable. (Checkoway 2007)

In the weeks following the screening of the film, we received an email from the son of one of the women, in which he praised the students' work for the positive effects it had on his mother. For the students, this kind of feedback is vital. Here they were seeing that academic work was having an impact on people's lives. The emotive element of engaged teaching enables students to understand the potential of their studies to affect change. I refer to an example from one of the student's journals:

“An email from X's son described how the Women of Steel project has given her a new lease of life and this is something I will eternally value as it is proof that the project didn't just take information from the women, but had a genuine interaction with them.” ('Storying Sheffield Learning Journal', June 9th, 2011)

Up against the clock: The 'Newsday'

Case study 3 examines a 'Newsday', an assessment that involves journalism students working in a group to produce news bulletins in real time. They take on roles ranging from News Producer to Presenter and are out covering real stories and dealing with members of the public for the purpose of putting together a programme for assessment.

Author: Katie Stewart, broadcast journalism lecturer at the University of Sheffield

“You will not get this degree from the library”

“We will throw you into an area of Sheffield and expect you to immerse yourself in the community”

“You will meet people and find stories”

“You are likely to come across more ASBOs than Bistros”

(Jonathan Foster, University Open Day, July 2011)

Prospective students and their parents often sit open mouthed as the BA Course Leader tries to paint a realistic picture for them of what life is like as a Journalism student at Sheffield. One of the crucial messages staff from the Department of Journalism Studies try to put across to the applicants is that the engagement with a huge cross-section of the public not only shapes the journalist, but also enriches the education of the student and helps to prepare them for life beyond the walls of academia.

I would like to draw on one particular type of assessment, which encapsulates many of the virtues of incorporating public engagement into the curriculum. Students are assessed both as a group and as individuals on qualities such as leadership, teamwork, and communication skills. We also examine their attitude to challenges, their positivity and keeping their cool under pressure. Working in this way develops students’ critical ability and gives them experience in collaboration – both with their peer group ‘team’ and with people from the outside world. These kinds of challenges are a vital part of becoming a practitioner in journalism, but also offer a whole host of transferable ‘life’ and ‘communication’ skills benefiting the student way beyond their degree.

Engaging with people in the city

During a ‘Newsday’ the challenges faced are unpredictable, but what is almost certain is that theory will be applied to practice in high-pressure situation. The journalism students will have to deal with people from all sorts of organisations and/or different walks of life. The interviewing, writing and production skills learned during their time on the course will be put into practice. They may find themselves at a Sheffield Wednesday press conference or arranging an interview with a visiting MP. They may be covering an on-going trial at Sheffield Crown Court or may travel to a crime scene and knock on doors to find eyewitnesses. They will undoubtedly face ethical pressures when dealing with the public.

The inherent nature of journalism means some relationships with people in the city will be transient, others more sustained. Trainee journalists need to make contacts, and build up trust. Sometimes the journalist will have more to gain from that relationship, at other times the ‘partner’ or contact may want help to communicate a message or publicise an incident or event. The trainee journalist must learn to operate with the utmost ethical standards while reconciling this with the pressure of the News Editor back at base demanding they get the story. Added to this are the time pressures and the looming on-air deadlines.

Figure 3. Newsday teams in action

Collaboration and teamwork

Students are given a range of roles to choose from. On a typical television Newsday, these are: Producer, Script Editor, Reporter, Camera crew, Sports producer, News Presenter and Sports Presenter. A typical number in a group would be twelve. The intensity of this kind of teamwork is unique. There is a very clear hierarchy and it is fascinating to examine the peer group dynamics. The Producer is essentially the boss. So, how does a student respond to a situation where they are suddenly in charge of their peers? Students argue and debate over running orders and story priorities. This relates to the notions of co-production; within their teams they must negotiate the treatment and prioritising of stories whilst being acutely aware of their target audience and the multiple interests at play. The news day scenario often mirrors a professional newsroom incorporating both the positives and negatives of throwing together a range of personalities to form a team.

Value of 'Real Life' Experience

Tutor observation, and both informal and formal student feedback, tells us that this project generates a huge sense of achievement and satisfaction. Students engage at a deep level. It is a huge learning experience. They feel challenged and pressured but see that as a positive and enjoy learning about how it feels to work in a real newsroom – even if this involves a roller coaster of emotions during the day. Students also recognise that the process teaches them about themselves and how they respond to dealing with interviewees or peers in those kinds of situations.

The main challenge for the tutor as facilitator is judging how and when to intervene. As a teacher, I want to give students the space and freedom to make mistakes and learn from them, but of course when dealing with real people mistakes can have serious consequences. 'The Newsday' needs close and intensive supervision, so the assessment places high demands on time and teaching resources.

Critical Reflection

Students are required to critically reflect on the experience and address issues of sensitivity, ethics, morals, and personal safety. They must display knowledge of industry guidelines, with an element of critical questioning. It is important to reflect on what editors may require of a young journalist, and to have the critical awareness to question some of those existing forms of practice and how the needs of the newspaper or television programme might come into conflict with personal morals or beliefs.

The journalism students are asked to write a 1500 word critical evaluation. The learning outcome here is as much about the process of the experience as the final result. .

In the 'The Reflective Practitioner', Donald Schön argues that the 'lack of clarity about what professionals actually did was one consequence of a widening rift between both research and practice, and thought and action' (Hunt, 223). Schön considers: "What is the kind of knowing in which competent practitioners engage? How is professional knowing like and unlike the kinds of knowledge presented in academic textbooks, scientific papers and learned journals?" (Schön, 1983)

What seems crucial here is that real value is placed on the importance of practical experience, and of developing (both in terms of mind and action) through the understanding of those practical experiences

“Phrónêsis is not well known or understood because the contemporary social sciences have lapsed into an over-simplified dualism between theory and practice whose principal function has been the separation of university social science from the everyday life world.” (Greenwood 2008).

It could be argued that the pedagogical nature of the three projects featured in this paper involves throwing students into unfamiliar territory where they are forced to draw on their resources far beyond anything written into a curriculum. Suddenly a huge amount of intense ‘experience’ is gained in a very short space of time.

Conclusion

Through developing a curriculum that enables public engagement, universities can encourage students to understand learning as something that happens in all parts of their lives, rather than something that occurs only during the period of a lecture or seminar session. Their conversations, relationships and ethics all matter. The consequence of this is not that research of this kind should become more risk averse, or limited in its scope, with tutors trying to control the outcomes, but rather that it should embrace its richer, and more contingent foundation. The social aspect of the project is incredibly important as it allows for meanings, values and relationships to sustain beyond the length of the course or direct involvement of the students. In an ideal case, students develop their sense of responsibility and gain insight into what the partners are giving; project partners also see themselves as ‘doing good’ by helping students to learn and contributing to a different kind of society.

In order to support student-led research that has both a ‘use’ and ‘academic’ value, a project or module must be well integrated into the curriculum and the learning must be centred on critical engagement with the process of the project rather than the success of the project itself, which is often out of the students’ control. Public engagement can allow for original, critical and collaborative learning because the briefs are by nature much more complex, without subject specific boundaries, or pre-determined working methods. These types of project offer the opportunity for students to learn with non-university partners who may have very different skills and life experiences.

The real life experiences outlined by these three projects could simply never be re-created in a classroom environment. Some disciplines may lend themselves more naturally to public engagement than others, but we would advocate that there is scope in almost every subject area to develop projects involving people outside of the campus. It takes innovative thinking and significant time and energy to develop these links – but we hope this paper takes a small step to argue why this should be seen as a way forward for Higher Education. When students reach out of the academic environment and engage with people in the wider community their social skills, confidence and understanding of the world are developed. The potential for research into practice and critical reflection is rich. University experience should combine academic achievement with the development of a person in the whole. Such holistic aims might also cohere with the necessity to engage proactively with the changes to the funding of Higher Education in the UK, where the challenge for disciplines to illustrate a discernible emphasis on skills and employability, while maintaining academic rigour, is all the more acute.

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Notes:

Figure 1. [PW](#) Live Project 2011, The School of Architecture, TUoS.

Figure 2. Andy Brown, The School of English, TUoS.

Figure 3. The Department of Journalism, TUoS.

[i] Reimagining Portland Works KT Rapid Response GRANT, The University of Sheffield £9,500.00 (awarded 2010) [RAs: Julia Udall, Jordan J. Lloyd, Charlotte Morgan].

www.portlandworks.co.uk/research/reimagining-portland-works

[ii] <http://www.liveprojects.org/>

[iii] <http://www.storyingsheffield.com/about/what-is-storying-sheffield-documents/>