Arts & Humanities today: reframing the ‘value’ debate

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A brief introduction

• US citizen from North Carolina

• Previous career working in the arts and nonprofits there, especially state-funded

• Academic research interests in cultural policy, especially history of arts policies and arts advocacy

• Currently finishing a book about the origins of the arts council as a policy model in the UK, its adoption in North America
A brief introduction

- International connection to the Czech Republic
- Moravian Protestant settlement in North Carolina founded in 1766
- Community called Salem that later merged to form the city of Winston-Salem in 1913
- W-S started the first local arts council in the US in 1949 as a project of the Junior League
'Winston-Salem’s interest in the arts and policy can be traced to three central drivers: its European heritage as an eighteenth-century Moravian settlement; the arts and cultural programs of its Junior League chapter; and the civic interests of the Hanes family who founded and developed the Hanes textile industry there in the twentieth century.'
What is the value of the Humanities?

- Origins in 2 research workshops during summer of 2009
- The rise of the impact agenda in Higher Ed
Humanities and policy scholarship

Tessa Jowell (DCMS 2004): “We lack convincing language and political arguments for how culture lies at the heart of a healthy society”.

Antefact: Dr Belfiore’s work on a Humanities-based approach to the exploration of the ‘social impact of the arts’ debate within cultural policy
What do we mean by ‘the Humanities’?

• Oxford English dictionary: the branch of learning concerned with human culture; the academic subjects comprising this branch of learning are history, literature, ancient and modern languages, law, philosophy, art, and music

• ‘disciplines which attempt to understand, across barriers of time and culture, the actions and creations of other human beings considered as bearers of meaning’ (Collini 2012: 64)
Towards an articulation of the value of the Humanities

- An image problem (UK and US)
- A persistent sense of crisis
- A defensive strategy: impact and trying to be useful
- Does a reliance on utility and impact as proxies for ‘value’ solve the problem?
- Some ideas to work towards alternative strategies
The humanities in perennial crisis:

‘It is possible to feel that one of the things ailing the humanities today is the amount of time humanists spend talking about what ails the humanities’ (Menand 2005).
The confidence issue (a “self-inflicted indignity?”)
Fighting the crisis: the impact agenda in the UK

• A linguistic and ideological shift from ‘funding’ to ‘investment’ in Humanities research reflects the encroachment of market values.

• Referring to impact seems a way to bypass the question of articulating the value of the humanities and to sidestep value-laden and therefore difficult debates.

• Socio-economic impact = An external form of validation and legitimacy.
Difficult questions left open

• Does the rhetoric of instrumentality conceal potential dangers?

• What about research for the sake of speculative knowledge irrespective of potential practical applications?

• Is ‘utility’ the only (or even the best) measure for value? In fact, isn’t the equation of ‘utility’ (or ‘impact’) with ‘value’ already a premise founded on a particular set of values?
Difficult questions left open

• How should artists and scholars approach the ‘value’ question?

• By striving to demonstrate more convincingly what impact they might have or – rather – by challenging the dominant market discourse and its focus on ‘utility’?
Making the case: An experiment

- **Beyond critique:** A more constructive attempt to show how A&H are involved in making a contribution to dealing with the problems of today

- **The means:** asking scholars to reflect on HOW values, approaches, ideas from the A&H have shaped their own research, field or professional practice.
Making the case: diverse voices

- Considered the academic humanities as representing one set of concerns and approaches to articulating the role of Arts & Humanities in contemporary life.
- Invited scholars from classics, modern languages, English literature, history, and visual studies to offer reflections.
- Included other fields and disciplines: geography, museum studies.
- Outside the academy: Business people, scientist, arts leaders who had faced these debates already.
- Both UK and US perspectives.
Making the case: diverse voices

• Today focus on two cases from the book that offer narratives that we might draw upon in our work as scholars, teachers, practitioners, and managers in the arts

• Eloquent chapter by Prof David Looseley from Leeds about research and study of modern languages and cultures

• My own chapter about the core values at the Penland School of Crafts in the United States
A&H thinking and contemporary issues: study and research of modern languages

- David Looseley, emeritus prof of French studies, discusses the tension of instrumentalist ‘impact’ arguments in the case of modern languages study
- Acceptable to argue that language study and proficiency necessary to global trade and foreign policy
- Advanced language study has immense value outside HE in business, diplomacy, translating, interpreting, teaching
- As dominant rationale, there are disadvantages!
A&H thinking and contemporary issues: study and research of modern languages

• Rationale relies on principle that learning a foreign language is **valuable** – no one will contest that, even politicians who made language study optional in the UK after age 14

• Why a languages degree and not just a module? Why a research department instead of a language centre? Other ways to master a language, ie, immersion

• False assumption – language skills can be learnt in isolation from the culture that produces it and that it produces
A&H thinking and contemporary issues: study and research of modern languages

‘To argue that such research is not essential to advanced language-learning is to construe modern languages as epistemologically different from other humanities, because it involves performative skills acquired through repetition and imitation, rather than constituting an area of human endeavour requiring fundamental exploration.’ (Looseley 2013, p. 94)
Languages academics use different rationales depending on the audience, but these are actually different models rather than different arguments.

What is needed is a better argument for the humanities that clarifies the place of modern languages within it.

One argument: the importance of humanities in ‘intercultural communication’ and ability to ‘deal with, offer narratives and intelligible accounts of, that which is other’ (Parker 2008 in Looseley 2013, p. 99)
A&H thinking and contemporary issues: study and research of modern languages

• When non-native speaker observes a foreign language and culture, and how their home culture is perceived, an awareness of distance and otherness is produced making educational and intellectual value of language study apparent

• Exposes the ‘structure of feeling’ (Raymond Williams, 1961, in Looseley 2013: 99) in a lived culture

• Observer and observed both more aware of cultural difference and more self-aware

• Enhanced intercultural communication and empathy
A&H thinking and contemporary issues: alternatives to ‘the market’?

- Looseley concludes with discussion of ‘what next?’ after failures of banking system
- Humanities scholars educate students who can reimagine ‘a new politics of the common good’ (after Sandel)
- Central to this is creating a ‘new narrative’ – in which humanists can play a key role
A&H thinking and contemporary challenges: sustainability

- Penland is a national, non-profit, craft education resource in North Carolina mountains operating since 1929
- Its roots are in arts and crafts revival and in anti-poverty programmes by Protestant churches and US government in the 1930s in Appalachia
- Using human values theory from cognitive sciences, we analyze the school’s published core values
Model of human values, Schwartz, 2006

- Openness to Change
- Self-Directedness (Creativity, Freedom)
- Universalism (Social Justice, Equality)
- Benevolence (Helpfulness)
- Conformity (Obedience)
- Tradition (Humility, Devoutness)
- Security (Social Order)
- Power (Authority, Wealth)
- Achievement (Success, Ambition)
- Hedonism (Pleasure)
- Stimulation (Exciting Life)
- Self-Enhancement

Organized by motivational similarities and dissimilarities
Human values research


‘We choose to highlight Schwartz for two reasons: first, because his work underpins much of the values research evident in OB (organizational behavior) today, yet his role is underemphasized, even though he developed his theory of values based on a sample of over 60,000 people around the world; and second, his work is influential and well-respected in psychology. Indeed we believe that over the next few years Schwartz’s model of values will become a dominant tool for understanding people’s values – be they employees or customers – and aligning the organization’s own values to those values’ (p. 62)
Penland’s ‘core values’

a) We respect artists, artistic integrity, and artistic quality. (Maps to value: benevolence)
b) We honor open communication, honesty, and integrity. (universalism)
c) We respect and preserve Penland’s history as we plan for its future. (tradition)
d) We serve people at all levels of skill. (universalism)
e) We welcome and respect diversity. (universalism)

(continued)

These core values are taken from the School’s strategic plan for May 2012-April 2016.
Penland’s ‘core values’ continued

f) We serve as an asset and resource to the community, the region, and the nation. (benevolence)
g) We take risks to be a leader in craft education. (self-direction)
h) We foster a dynamic, supportive, working and learning environment for students, instructors, and staff. (benevolence)
i) We care for the physical place and are good stewards of the environment. (universalism)
j) We support robust financial and strategic planning as a road map to sustainability. (self-direction)
Penland’s core values and human values

4 core values map to **benevolence** ‘self-transcendent’
(benevolence: preserving and enhancing welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact)

3 core values map to **universalism** ‘self-transcendent’
(universalism: understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature)

1 core value maps to **tradition**
2 core values map to **self-direction**

7 of 10 core values map to ‘self-transcendent’ values
All 10 core values cluster on self-transcendent side
Penland’s core values in practice

Creativity – All skill levels accepted. Collaboration, risk-taking, experimentation, and cross studio ‘play’ encouraged. Studios open 24 hours/day. Staff encouraged to take studio classes, balance work life with creative practice, explore administrative work as creative practice.

Egalitarianism – Skilled artists and novices use studios together and share practices.

Open communication with respect – Campus now wireless, but use of mobiles and laptops discouraged when people gathered in community. No TVs, daily newspapers on this residential campus.
Penland’s core values and human values

Conclusion: The experience of being at Penland school reinforces an individual’s (student, staff, volunteer worker) personal values of universalism and benevolence, both categorized as self-transcendent values by human values theory. This suggests that an individual can have a creative experience at the school which is at the same time, morally and ethically refreshing and restorative.
A&H thinking and contemporary challenges: sustainability

• We argue that ‘humanist’ thinking drives its organisational behaviour

• Penland’s 10 ‘core values’ reinforce mutual respect, tolerance, reciprocity, creativity, and care for the environment

• Reinforces universal human values of ‘benevolence’ and ‘universalism’ needed to combat global issues like overpopulation, climate change (Common Cause, 2010)
Reinforcing ‘personal values’

• In a book about ‘value’, we discuss the study of personal values and how organisations and cultures influence or shape citizens’ values

• Human values theory suggests that if we constantly stress the economic impacts of the arts and humanities -- if our functional rationales appeal ONLY to the self-interest of our students -- we are reinforcing personal values that can undermine A&H
Concluding thoughts

• The impact discourse is predicated on a view of impact and an economics-based notion of utility as a proxy for value: this is narrow and limiting and will de-value the A&H further

• Regimes of ‘evaluation’ linked to this impact agenda

• Hijacking the impact agenda: impact needs to be reformulated in terms of what should be expected from the A&H – *engage*!

• The A&Hs are already ‘delivering’ on this ‘key target’ – they have been for about 2,500 years! Let’s be bold about it!