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BOOK REVIEW

## Rebecca S. Wingo, Jason Hepler and Paul Schadewald (eds), *Digital Community Engagement: Partnering Communities with the Academy* (Cincinnati: Cincinnati University Press, 2020). Pp. 225. Paper \$32.95, E-Book, free<sup>1</sup>

Reviewed by Ann-Marie Foster

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This collection of essays, edited by Rebecca S. Wingo, Jason Hepler and Paul Schadewald, introduces readers to digital community engagement, or DiCE, as they call it. The acronym is not only a useful one, but one which situates the book among the intellectual forerunners of the field. As they explain in the introduction, they created this volume because when they needed it, it did not exist. The result is an open access collection of nine case studies, written by people involved in community/academy partnerships, most of which are co-authored, which offer an insight into the collaborative projects with a digital element.

This volume is designed to be read by both academics interested in creating a DiCE project and by partners who are thinking about working with the academy. At times, this seems a little more geared towards the academic side of this partnership. However, all of the chapters are written in an accessible manner and show the competing demands of collaborators. The pedagogy of doing digital community engagement projects with students is often touched upon, showing potential partners how their projects can be aided by those studying in formal educational settings. All case studies are from the US, and while it is recognised that this perhaps narrows the scope of the volume, there is more than enough within its (digital) pages to make up for this.

The overwhelming theme of the collection is how DiCE projects can help enact social change, and all projects have their roots in activism, disrupting the historical status quo. Hubbard's chapter neatly shows how digital archives can establish resistance to structural racism. Anderson and Wingo's chapter demonstrates how History Harvests can record the experiences of Black neighbourhoods destroyed by historically racist town planning policies. Beaujot's chapter discusses how the *Hear, Here* project in La Crosse helped to pressure local

authorities as part of a campaign by the Ho-Chunk Nation to remove an offensive statue from the downtown area. Sullivan's chapter considers how students can be involved in projects which have their roots in trauma, building empathy with the communities worked with. It is a strength of this volume that all writers touch upon power dynamics and consider them as ongoing issues. It is stressed repeatedly that when formulating a digital engagement project an understanding of the position of various collaborators must be at its core, permeating through all layers of engagement, from project meetings to the licences applied to digitised material.

Contributors stress the community aspects of DiCE, in particular the amount of face-to-face work involved in setting up projects. As Brock, Hunter, Morris and Murrian's chapter highlights, digital output is not necessarily the most important outcome from a community/academy partnership. This is accompanied by practical guides to setting up a project. And the chapter by Augusto, Bragg, Chafe, Cobb, Cox, Crosby, Deal, Forner, Gartell, Hogan, Jeffries, Lawson, Nelson, Richardson, Sexton and Tyson, aside from being impressively co-written, offers a set of advice for any potential collaborators to consider before entering into a working arrangement.

Chapters discuss the digital side of the projects in varying levels of detail. One of the most involved discussions about this was by Collier and Connolly. They discussed having to use two sites – one to add metadata to the digitised diaries at the core of their project; the other a simpler version which was more user-friendly. While many chapters touch on digital inequalities, Schuette, Telligman and Wuerffel are particularly keen to stress that when doing digital engagement projects thought must be given to those without internet access. Their project, which focused on homelessness, would have excluded those it sought to draw attention to if the digital project was not accompanied by a physical one. It is also in the digital where the open access version of the text shines, with embedded links to all of the projects mentioned. Thompson and Carlisle-Cummins use this to particularly good effect, enmeshing their text with the podcast that inspired the chapter.

Taken together, this collection is a welcome addition to the field of community engagement and one which is designed to stimulate discussion. The editors encourage readers to see the volume as a prompt for further conversations and readers are encouraged to highlight, annotate and connect through it. This volume opens up a conversation about DiCE which is long overdue, with the digital format of the text suggesting it is one that will continue for some time to come.

## Endnotes

1. See <<https://ucinnatipress.manifoldapp.org/projects/digital-community-engagement>>.