The many shades of co-produced evidence

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Enabling Wellbeing

Briefing Paper

Co-production of Evidence

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CarnegieUK
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CHANGING MINDS • CHANGING LIVES

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Contents

1.   Introduction

The Carnegie UK Trust has been active in generating and disseminating evidence on wellbeing for over 100 years. We are known for our high quality and easily-digested reports on key social policy issues and we actively engage in taking evidence into the 'real world' of policy and practice.

WORKING DEFINITIONS

Social policy and practice: Academic disciplines primarily covered by the social sciences that are applying their research to real-world policy and practice.

Evidence: The available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is valid or true (Alliance for Useful Evidence, 2016).

Research: A process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared (REF 2021, 2018).

Co-production of evidence: A process by which evidence is generated by the equal and reciprocal participation in research activities by academic and other partners.

Knowledge: A social construct where different 'truths' are equally valid (Shucksmith, 2016). Knowledge production can bring together formal knowledge, often provided by academics, with tacit or experiential knowledge.

Evidence generation in social policy and practice has been changing, moving away from the ivory towers and closer to the people it studies. We support this shift. Our experience is that real social change happens when a range of sectors and interests come together. Creativity is unleashed by bringing people into contact with others from different perspectives to share knowledge and possibilities.

In this paper we explore what this looks like in relation to producing social policy evidence. The purpose of the paper is to tease out challenges and opportunities around co-producing evidence appropriate to participatory social policy and practice, and increasing people's control within communities and services. This is not a history or review of co-production – there are other places to find that – but rather a contribution to discussions we are involved in with co-production networks, academics and the social sector.

The paper focusses on generating evidence, rather than how we use knowledge in society, but many of the principles and challenges around co-producing are shared.

2. Background

We believe bringing people from varied backgrounds and organisations together in the production of evidence will lead to research having a greater reach and more significant impact on social policy and practice.

In part, this is our experience of working in this space, but there is also growing evidence that, in order to increase evidence use, researchers need to actively engage with various 'publics' rather than rely on pushing out research findings to them. In 2016, we made the case for improving links between universities and the third sector, and recommended how this could be done (Shucksmith, 2016). Now, we are talking to the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement about applying this learning to other sectors, specifically the public libraries sector. Carnegie UK Trust is a member of Horizon 2020 ACCOMPLISSH, the EU co-creation project for increasing the impact of social science and humanities, and we are supporting the Newcastle Institute for Social Renewal to produce a toolkit for co-creating knowledge (University of Groningen Sustainable Society, 2017).

Our experience is that the language around co-production, and evidence, can be confusing. In ongoing conversations around the Scottish approach to evidence, people say the evidence landscape in Scotland hasn't kept up with policy changes and want more co-produced evidence (Coutts & Brotchie, 2017). However, what is meant by co-produced evidence isn't always clear: co-production still means many things to many people. We have grappled with our own interpretation and this paper contributes to clarifying our understanding.

3.   Co-production of services

Before talking about co-production of evidence it is useful to look at co-production in general. Think tanks, including the OECD, development agencies, and government departments, have been promoting the co-production of services for several years. They view co-production as the sharing of power between professionals and people using services, their families, or citizens in general, in order to deliver improved outcomes.

A summary of the features and principles being used in UK jurisdictions for developing and delivering co-produced services is in Table 1. It includes an evidence co-production initiative in health care, which is a National Institute for Health Research project that has published guidance on the co-production of health and social care research (INVOLVE, 2018).

Table 1 shows a cross-sectoral consensus around the features of co-production, which commonly include:

- Recognising people as assets
- Including all perspectives and skills
- Supporting people to meaningfully share and participate
- Public services becoming change agents that facilitate people's inclusion
- Everyone benefiting from working together
- Developing networks of mutual support.

Fundamental to co-production is the meaningful inclusion of people who are not already 'in' the organisation developing or delivering the service. It means recognising the experiences and skills of recipients of services, or local communities: something that is not always easy for service providers with targets and established ways of working.

A co-production approach can be used across the life of services and projects, and resources like the Co-production Star describe how (Governance International, n.d.). Initiatives, varying from the Big Lottery's Fulfilling Lives programme, to UK co-production networks and OECD's Citizen Powered Cities, advocate the Co-production Star as a tool for public sector transformation, recalibrating the relationship between commissioners, decision-makers and communities (see *Resources: Section 3* for more details).

Within the co-production of services, co-evaluation of services and projects is not common. There are resources that list the required conditions for co-production and we have found examples of process evaluations (see *Resources: Section 3*), but few examples of co-produced impact evaluations.

This is changing: for example, The Co-production Network for Wales is planning to co-evaluate the Big Lottery's Helping Working Families project in Wales and, in 2017, Evaluation Support Scotland said,

> **❝ [Co-production is] a way to achieve positive outcomes for people and communities. So surely we should be measuring those outcomes rather than the co-productive processes that achieve the outcomes. ❞**
>
> **Marwick, 2017**

Understanding the difference co-production makes

There is a growing body of narrative evidence for the effectiveness of co-production in improving outcomes (see *Resources: Section 2*), but we need more, and more robust, evidence to understand the difference co-production makes. A systematic review of co-production in public service reform concluded that most studies are qualitative and case examples; and there needs to be a greater focus on understanding the outcomes produced by co-production processes (Voorberg, et al., 2015). To understand the value of co-production in public sector reform, we need to assess its impact on service and population level outcomes, in addition to the current focus on personal outcomes.

Table 1: The Features and Principles of Co-Production (see Resources: Table 1 for reference details)

Nesta and NEF. *The Challenge of Co-production.* 2009 (1)	SCIE. *Co-production in Social Care.* 2013 (2)	NEF and Nesta. *Co-production right here right now.* 2013 (3)	*Co-production Network for Wales.* 2018 (4)	*Scottish Co-Production Network. The Vision for Co-production in Scotland.* (5)	*Northern Ireland Department of Health. Co-production guide.* 2018 (6)	INVOLVE. *Guidance on Co-producing a Research Project.* 2018 (7)
Recognising people as assets, because people themselves are the real wealth of society.	Equality – everyone has assets.	Recognising people as assets. People are equal partners.	Valuing all participants, and building on their strengths.	All people are included equally in making our communities better places to live.	Valuing people.	Respecting and valuing the knowledge of everyone involved in the research.
Promoting reciprocity, giving and receiving – because it builds trust between people and fosters mutual respect.	Valuing diversity and inclusion.	Building people's capacity: supporting people to use their assets.	Doing what matters for all the people involved.	**Citizens are supported to meaningfully share and participate** at all levels of service provision.	Representative.	**Including all perspectives and skills** – the researchers should include all those who can make a contribution.
Building social networks.	Accessibility.	**Public service agencies are facilitators, and catalysts of change.**	People can be change makers, and organisations enable this.		Building capacity.	**Reciprocity, so everybody benefits from working together.**
	Reciprocity.	Blur roles.	Build relationships of trust; share power and responsibility.		Staff, leaders and managers become facilitators and enablers.	Building and maintaining relationships, which support the sharing of power.
		Mutuality: reciprocal relationship.	**Developing networks of mutual support.**		Cross-boundary working.	
		Networks as a way of transferring knowledge.			Contribution of all partners to be valued: reciprocal recognition.	

Legend:

- People are assets
- Blur roles
- Include all perspectives
- Mutual benefits
- Build citizens' capacity
- Develop networks
- Services are facilitators

4. Co-production of evidence

Just as the demand for co-production of services is increasing, so is interest in the co-production of evidence and knowledge. In 2017, Carnegie UK Trust explored social policy professionals' and practitioners' opinions of using co-production in evidence generation and use.

We found a clear appetite for more co-produced evidence, and a belief that it would make research more accessible and relevant. Most of the respondents saw benefits to co-produced evidence, in terms of increasing the contribution of research to their work: 78% said co-produced research would make research more relevant and 73% of people surveyed said that co-production adds value to their work.

To understand better what the process looks like in practice, and what counts as good quality in co-produced evidence, we have learnt from the co-production of services, where fundamental attributes have been identified (see Table 1). They highlight the social nature of good quality co-production. In

Figure 1: The Benefits of Co-produced Evidence

8 out of 10 say it would make evidence more relevant

8 out of 10 say it would make evidence more influential for policy

8 out of ten say it would make evidence more influential for practice

6 out of ten say it would make evidence easier to access

The findings are from a survey, which provided a snapshot of views of those interested in social policy evidence across the UK. 43% of respondents worked in England, 40% in Scotland. 9% in Wales, and 8% in Northern Ireland. Just under half of respondents where from the third or voluntary sector, 36% the public sector, and 8% private sector.

Our definition of co-production was "the process by which evidence is generated by the equal and reciprocal participation in research activities by academia and other partners".

addition, we have looked for case studies and leaders in co-produced evidence, but found few. One example was the N8 co-production programme, which was a partnership of universities, communities, the private and public sectors within five pilot projects (Vanderhoven & Campbell, 2016). This gave recommendations for commissioners and funders; academic institutions; researchers and non-academic organisations. The research report emphasised that evidence production is a process traditionally led by academics, but the co-production of evidence requires those previous leaders to become facilitators, recognising others' skills, assets and perspectives.

We have developed a diagrammatic representation of the process of the co-production of evidence. Figure 2 conceptualises the different stages of evidence production and compares the traditional research process with the equivalent steps for co-producing evidence. It outlines five steps in the co-production of evidence, and suggests that co-production could take place at all or any of those steps. It is based on the idea of Co-production Star, which specifies four components of service design and delivery (Governance International, n.d.).

CO-PRODUCING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE SKILLS SYSTEM IN MANCHESTER

When, in England, skills planning and delivery was devolved from central government to city-regions, the University of Manchester set up a co-productive approach to find out what knowledge Manchester stakeholders needed to manage and benefit from this change. The University worked with New Economy, a trading arm of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, to bring together a range of stakeholders new to each other– schools, colleges, training providers, universities and consultancies. This group set the agenda for the research project. The key partners recognised this was different from the traditional approach, where a university academic(s) would have initiated and designed the research. It meant that the traditional domain of universities – production of new research – had to be managed alongside the needs of other participants. In the process, researchers acted as facilitators, encouraging the involvement of the diverse range of stakeholders. The project was described as having a 'negotiated nature', where the University team focussed on partnership development and building positive relationships with local stakeholders. The process resulted in participants learning about the views and challenges in skills development from other groups, and in a co-produced report for the city-region (adapted from, *"Aligning Local Economic Development and Skill Formation"* pp 62-66 (Vanderhoven & Campbell, 2016)).

Figure 2

	TRADITIONAL RESEARCH PROCESS	CO-PRODUCTION OF EVIDENCE
Stage One: Research Project Development	Write grant proposal	Co-design project
Stage Two: Data Gathering	Interviewing	Peer researcher interviewing
Stage Three: Analysis	Desk-based data analysis	Data analysis workshop
Stage Four: Interpretation	Report production	Multi agency co-assessment
Stage Five: Research into Action	Dissemination	Feedback to the community

Issues around co-production of evidence

a) Different paradigms

Traditional evidence production and co-production have different paradigms. Academia values objectivity and the separation of researchers and the subjects of research, to reduce bias. Whereas for a process to be co-production, roles should be shared and boundaries between the participants become blurred. For some people conducting social research, this is not so problematic, because already they view evidence production as a social process, where there is a dynamic relationship between researchers and subjects, who inevitably influence each other (Orr & Bennett, 2009).

An additional challenge is the cult of the academic expert, because it doesn't sit easily with co-production which emphasises mutual relationships. Co-production implies that no one sector or person has all the skills and knowledge necessary to solve real world problems, or even to improve or develop services. Co-produced evidence moves away from the idea of academics as 'experts' or the 'big fish' within their fields. It requires the 'big fish' to swim over to join the shoal of small fish. Culturally, academics achieve status within their sector by the dominance of their ideas, findings and theories, they are required to 'own' this, and any impact it achieves, personally. When working in a co-productive way, they become just one of a number of players with success being measured by the collaborative success of the endeavour (Wallace, 2019 forthcoming). Such an approach requires flexibility and respect for the cultures, knowledge and pressures of the partners outwith academia. The production of evidence through research becomes "a soup" that blends research producers and users, and hence the production and impact of evidence (Pain & Raynor, 2016).

b) Systemic challenges

The frameworks for higher education, including the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and the forthcoming Knowledge Exchange Framework, increasingly emphasise the need for universities to develop partnerships with people and organisations outside their boundaries. Challenges in taking forward wider engagement, including co-production, are inevitable because the REF is not a shared tool and it focuses on research excellence. The higher education system prizes methodological rigour in research and contains established institutional structures and career paths based on specialisation - this is in contradiction with co-production, which transcends disciplinary boundaries.

Within the REF, the impact case studies offer greater opportunities for developing co-production than the measures of excellence. Guidance for the new REF states they have to show "reach" and "significance" and that research and impact might be a non-linear relationship (REF 2021, 2018).

The nature of university research funding still presents barriers. Firstly, it is agreed at a national level, whereas service users' interests are likely to be more local. The traditional allocation of funding, based on outcomes, fits with a linear model of research production followed by dissemination and impact. Co-production needs flexibility, and funding that allows that and provides time to develop relationships and co-design research. As the N8 partnership found, working with non-academic partners means accommodating real world, real time changes.

> 66 **You can't capture / pin down your research topic and make it stay still while you examine it!** 99
> **Vanderhoven & Campbell, 2016, p. 20**

One of the recommendations of the N8 partnership was that, instead of projects, partnerships should be funded, including support to maintain them between projects.

c) Practical issues

There are practice issues too, for example, the time available to both parties. Researchers may have limited time available within a grant, but listening to and supporting contributions from people outside the organisation will take time. The time required also might be an issue for the co-producers, especially when, unlike the researchers, they may not be paid for their contribution.

Although changing the role of researchers to include the perspectives and skills of the co-producers is challenging, techniques like clarifying expectations at the start of the project can help achieve success. A recent study on the co-production of a mental health service in Northern Ireland found it is important to recognise each other's constraints early in the process. For example, community members and practitioners may not be able to prioritise data gathering. The study points out the need for the development phase, stage one, which could include jointly writing funding proposals (McConnell, et al., 2018).

What Works Scotland, after co-producing with researchers, policy makers and social project practitioners, concluded:

> 66 **Co-production requires time, focus, flexibility and targeted coordination of existing resources.** 99
> **Cullingworth, et al., 2018**

Co-producing evidence means researchers enabling people's involvement and, therefore, using partnership development and facilitation skills. In many cases, researchers will need to acquire and hone these skills.

5. Progressing the co-production of evidence

We have touched on some of the barriers to increasing the co-production of evidence by academics and universities, including how research is funded.

Despite the constraints, there are several opportunities for progressing co-production of evidence within the umbrella of increasing universities' engagement and participation with partners and citizens. Strategically there is the increased focus of publicly and charity funded organisations on impact and public value. Then, there are specific initiatives like the National Co-ordination Centre for Public Engagement, which supports public engagement practice in universities and has experience of brokering partnerships between sectors (NCCPE, n.d.).

To move on from where we are now, we suggest focussing on specific parts of the co-production process outlined in Figure 2. Some stages, such as Stage 3, analysis, maybe complex, depending on the types of data collected and the analysis skills needed, but the latter stages of the process offer fertile ground. Researchers outside of social science, in conservation, argue that co-assessment of research findings is the most efficient and impactful part of the co-production process. Researchers and local stakeholders come together to assess the relevance of the evidence to the local context. Local stakeholders add

contextual knowledge and experience, and are part of crucial process of making recommendations to decision-makers (Sutherland, et al., 2017).

Initiatives and funding targeted at the first stage of co-producing evidence, giving people time together before proposals are written or theories developed, will make a difference. Creating the space, skills and funding models for academic and non-academic partners to develop projects together will encourage co-production through building relationships between stakeholders.

Carnegie UK Trust and the co-production of evidence

Carnegie UK Trust recognises that co-production can be a messy business, and as it moves into the realms of evidence generation and use, it's unlikely to become cleaner or more contained.

The principles of co-production have been well articulated (see Table 1) and even if the context of research impacts upon them, for an action to be co-production it should adhere to these principles.

We have found it difficult to unearth examples of co-produced evidence that fit the principles. We think there are examples out there, which we just don't know about yet. This can include experiences of co-production which go unrecognised as such by the participants or have been given other names, such as action research. If you know of any, please get in touch and we can explore them further as we continue to advocate for the development and use of co-produced evidence.

In taking forward this work, we intend to:

- Find and explore more examples of co-produced evidence. We will use these examples to illustrate the stages in the co-production of research outlined in Figure 2, and to adapt and improve the diagram of the process, where necessary. In particular we are looking for examples that show the importance and practice of flexibility in the research process.

- Scope out opportunities for trying out the co-production of evidence. For example, providing seed funding for Stage 1, project development, and working with interested intermediaries, such as the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement, to start up co-production partnerships. The Civic University Commission will report soon and we will examine its recommendations for ways of supporting academics to co-produce.

- Promote cross jurisdictional learning by bringing together the organisations and networks leading on the co-evaluation or co-assessment of projects and services by third sector organisations.

- Support the cross-sectoral nature of co-produced evidence through working with the Newcastle Institute for Social Renewal on their project to provide guidance to the researchers seeking to co-produce with private, public and third sectors.

We'd be interested to hear your views on this paper and your experiences of co-production of evidence. Please don't hesitate to contact Carnegie UK Trust, by emailing pippa@carnegieuk.org.

Resources

Table 1

1. Nesta and NEF. *The Challenge of Co-production* (Boyle & Harris, 2013).[1]

2. SCIE. *Co-production in social care: What it is and how to do it* (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2013).

3. Nesta and NEF. *Co-production: Right here right now* (Boyle, et al., 2013).[2]

4. Co-production network for Wales. Online 'Knowledge Base' (Co-production Network for Wales, 2018).

5. Scottish Co-production Network. *The Vision for Co-production in Scotland* (Scottish Co-production Network, 2017).

6. Northern Ireland Department of Health. *Co-production Guide: Connecting and Realising Value Through Involving People* (Department of Health, 2018).

7. INVOLVE. *Guidance on Co-producing a Research Project* (INVOLVE, 2018).[3]

[1] This paper included an additional principle, which is to value work differently, "to recognise everything as work that people do to raise families, look after people, maintain healthy communities, social justice and good governance".

[2] Replicated in subsequent NEF and Nesta publications and elsewhere, e.g. Scotland's Health and Social Care Alliance uses NEF principles.

[3] This is aimed at research organisations interested in co-producing with patients and the public. It is a set of principles for co-producing evidence with service users and patients, which vary slightly from co-produced service design principles. INVOLVE are preparing more guidance on principles in practice, which will include examples of co-produced research.
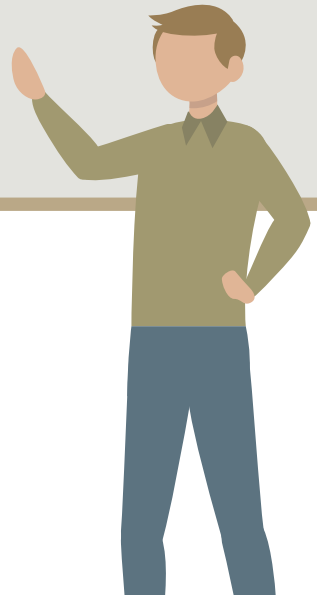
Section 3

The Scottish Third Sector Forum Evidence Paper. *Evidencing Successful Co-production in the Third Sector* (The Scottish Third Sector Research Forum, 2017).

Nesta's People Powered Health Programme (Nesta, The Innovation Unit, 2011-2013).

What Works Scotland. *Co-production and Public Service Reform* (Cullingworth, et al., 2018).

Big Lottery Fund. *The Co-production Approach* (Big Lottery Fund, n.d.).

Scottish Co-production Network. *Co-production – how we make a difference together*, which is a suite of resources – videos, case studies and information to help spread understanding of co-production (Scottish Co-production Network, n.d.).

Scottish Co-production Network. *100 stories of co-production* (Scottish Co-production Network, n.d.).

Public Health Wales/Co-production Wales. *Seeing is Believing: Co-production Case Studies from Wales* (Public Health Wales and Co-production Wales, 2015).

Observatory of Public Sector Innovation. *Fifty case studies from the Citizen Powered Cities Programme* (OECD and Governance International, 2016).

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Wallace (2019) forthcoming

The Carnegie UK Trust works to improve the lives of people throughout the UK and Ireland, by changing minds through influencing policy, and by changing lives through innovative practice and partnership work. The Carnegie UK Trust was established by Scots-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1913.

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