Review of Shaping the Campus Conversation

on Student Learning and Experience:

Activating the Results of Assessment in Action

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Abstract: Review of Brown, K., Gilchrist, D., Goek, S., Hinchliffe, L. J., Malenfant, K., Ollis, C., & Payne, A.

(Eds.) (2018). *Shaping the campus conversation on student learning and experience: Activating the*

results of Assessment in Action. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries.

Karen Brown and a host of others created *Shaping the Campus Conversation on Student Learning and Experience: Activating the Results of Assessment in Action* with two aims: First they encourage libraries to partner with other departments to assess their library's services in a way that aligns institutional goals. Through the ACRL's Assessment in Action initiative (2013-2016), 188 librarian-led teams sharpened their assessment and research skills; produced posters, book chapters, and articles; and increased their libraries' social capital and visibility. This makes *Shaping the Campus Conversation* part guidebook and part encouragement source for: academic librarians new to assessment, academic librarians ready to increase their evaluation repertoire, and campus officials and administrators (Brown et. al., 2018, p. ix). *Shaping the Campus Conversation* also "provides, in a single and comprehensive work, the story of AiA [Assessment in Action] -- the context surrounding its development, findings of team-based assessment projects, insights about the program results, reflection about its impact, and recommendation for future directions," (Brown et. al., 2018, p.vii) leaving a record that is immune to link rot, and blazing a paper trail that library school students can follow.

For librarians considering assessment partnerships outside the silo, *Shaping the Campus Conversation's* Chapters 7-15 and 18 (Sections 2 and 3) shine. Brown et. al.(2018) chose nine of the 188 teams that completed Assessment in Action, and the team leaders tell their stories. The variety of voices, often a bug in edited works, is a feature as is the diversity of library services in the spotlight. Librarians partnered with offices that help disadvantaged populations (Brown et. al., 2018, pp.185-192; chapter13), leaders of a first year research course program (Brown et. al., 2018, pp.147-153; chapter 8), an Aboriginal and international student support office (Brown et. al., 2018, pp.169-176; chapter 11), as well as institutional research departments (Brown et. al., 2018, ;chapter 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15). AiA team

leaders' reflections cover everything from: roving reference outside the library (Brown et. al., 2018, pp. 185-192; chapter 13), to pop-up/drop-in tutoring (Brown et. al., 2018, pp. 155-160; chapter 9), to instruction in first year experience courses (Brown et. al., 2018, pp. 147-153; chapter 8). Team leaders frequently used their AiA projects to springboard increased assessment (Brown et. al.. 2018; chapters 7, 8, 14, and 15), temporarily expand drop-in tutoring services (Brown et.al., 2018, p.158; chapter 9), train English faculty to teach information literacy (Brown et. al., 2018, pp.203-205; chapter 15), and even hire a part time statistician (Brown et. al., 2018, pp.194-195; chapter 14).

Authentic success stories and enthusiasm, however, are not enough for librarians considering assessment alliances. Helpful guidance begins with linguistic honesty. Brown, her colleagues, and the team leaders that wrote Chapters 7-15 transform stakeholder into a euphemism. One might believe that in higher education stakeholders include tuition-paying students and employees, who keep an institution operating. This is not Brown et. al.'s definition. Of Assessment in Action's 188 teams, over fifty, thirty-one percent, lacked an additional librarian besides the leader (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016). Of the teams with reflections in Chapters 7-15, four out of nine, forty-four percent, lacked additional librarians, and no Action in Assessment team included paraprofessionals or students (Brown et. al., 2018). Clearly Brown et. al's stakeholders are only those who run programs or control purse strings. *Shaping the Campus Conversation's* stakeholder means hierarchy or chain of command.

In this context, stakeholder, becomes a linguistic weapon. *The Power Thesaurus* ("Stakeholder" [Antonyms]", 2018) lists the term's antonyms as an array of neutrals, disinterested parties, and outsiders. A hierarchy, by contrast, includes both superiors and subordinates. Moreover, administrators are themselves often subordinate to state legislatures and/or boards of trustees.

Acknowledging power's extent and limits can be more inclusive than courting the powerful and excluding everyone else.

Brown et. al. never ask how far the benefits of working with the hierarchy extend. Stephanie Bush (Brown et. al., 2018, p.158), who wrote Chapter Nine, failed to restart a stalled renovation project despite her team's glowing assessment of drop-in tutoring. And Brown and colleagues (2018) have the sense not to even suggest that a library's newfound, social capital can unfreeze positions; keep a collection budget from plummeting to zero; or protect a just-in-case resource, books for browsing, or a technical services department.

Brown et. al. (2018), and the nine AiA team leaders, neither explain why they did **not** choose certain potential team members, nor discuss how to make sure superiors are safe, beneficial, or available partners. Katie Bishop watched a dean, associate dean, and two directors breeze through her library's revolving door (Brown et. al., 2018, p.185; chapter 13). When this reviewer's library could have applied for the 2013-2014 Assessment in Action cycle, her institution was recovering from a twenty-five-million dollar shortfall due to less than careful accounting ("Budget", 2012-2016). Administration eventually laid off over 250 employees, and there were no travel funds available for "Jam Sessions" or ALA poster presentations ("Budget", 2012-2016)(Brown et. al., 2018, pp.311-318; Appendix F).

Librarians need trustworthy partners in power because assessment can include mistakes and bears bad news. Adam Brennan and Lisa Haldeman (Brown et. al., 2018, p.148; chapter 8) confess to three unclear questions that blighted a portion of their evaluation tests. Mary O'Kelly's (Brown et. al., 2018, p. 142; chapter 7) Knowledge Market did not increase students' GPA, and Stephanie Bush's (Brown et. al., 2018, p.158; chapter 9) drop-in tutoring boosted retention by 1.2%.

More generally, a trustworthy chain of command is necessary because assessment cultures can

turn toxic. The *Oxford English Dictionary* ("Assessment, n.", 2018), gives evaluation as a

synonym/definition for assessment. Evaluation, especially individual performance ratings,

 is sometimes less than fair. Human resource professionals (Highhouse, Guion, & Doverspike, 2015, pp.

263-284)(Djurdjevic &Wheeler, 2014, pp.147-176) admit that politics pollutes performance evaluations

in the business world. Numerous boards of education have applied summative assessment of student

performance, often called Value Added, to merit pay, retention, and dismissal decisions (Collins, 2014,

pp.1-28)(Shen, Simon & Kelcey, 2016, pp.1-12). In Atlanta, pressure to produce high test scores and the

fear of retaliation for not meeting the mark fomented a monumental cheating scandal (Aronson,

Murphy & Salutz, 2016, pp.1-26). And in higher education high stakes evaluations of teaching faculty

can be: biased (Boring, Ottoboni, & Stark, 2016, pp.1-11), less than reliable (Clayson, 2018, pp.666-681),

and may not measure deep learning at all (Carrell & West, 2010, pp.409-433), yet teaching evaluations

determine both promotion and retention. Alas, Brown and colleagues (2018), including the team

leaders in Chapters 7-15, offer no suggestions for keeping assessment beneficial and benign.

As a record of the Assessment in Action program, *Shaping the Campus Conversation* also falls

short. Brown et. al. (2018) admit that Chapters 3-6, 16, and Appendix B "were first published

elsewhere." (p. ix) Actually, eighteen of *Shaping the Campus Conversation's* twenty-nine chapters and

appendices are freely available online.

Chapter #	Where available
2	http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/documents/Occasional_Paper31.pdf
3	http://www.acrl.ala.org/value
4	http://www.acrl.ala.org/value
5	http://www.acrl.ala.org/value
6	https://acrl.ala.org/value/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Value-of-Academic-Libraries-Statement-FINAL.pdf

10	https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/librarypubs/90/
13	https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1034&context=crisslibfacpub
14	https://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/f/K_Grigg_Assessing_2017.pdf
15	https://hdl.handle.net/2144/29266
16	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2015.10.004
17	https://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/2018/shaping-campus-conversation-chapter17.pdf
Appendix A	http://www.ala.org/acrl/AiA#cycle
Appendix B	http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/issues/value/val_summit.pdf
Appendix D	http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/AiA%20interim%20report%20to%20IMLS%20FINAL%20no%20cover.pdf
Appendix E	http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/AiA%20interim%20report%20to%20IMLS%202014%20FINAL%20no%20cover.pdf
Appendix F	http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/AiA%20final%20report%20to%20IMLS%20FINAL%20no%20cover.pdf
Appendix I	https://www.acrl.ala.org/value/?page_id=980
Appendix J	http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/publications/whitepapers/academiclib.pdf

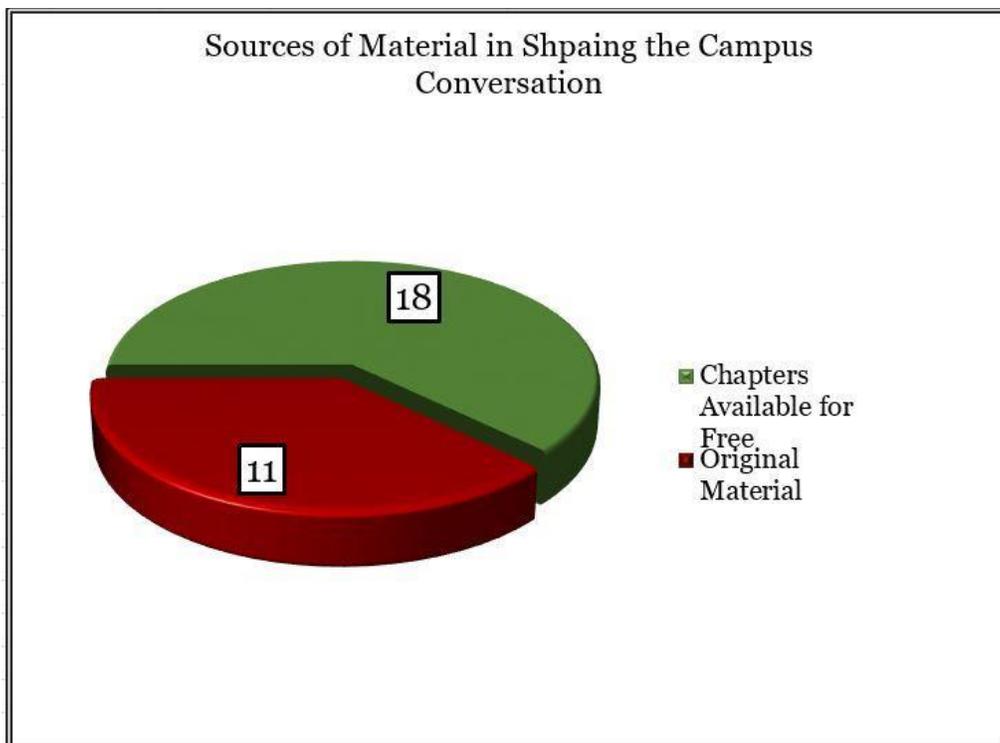Figure 1. URLs for chapter content

Figure 2. Extent of web-duplicated material

This much duplication weakens the case for purchasing a seventy-dollar book.

Moreover, unexplained, early Twenty-First Century, K-12 pedagogy language may make

Shaping the Campus Conversation opaque to future library school students. Brown and colleagues

(2018, p.17) use rubric to mean grading sheet or scoring guide. Neither *Dictionary.com* ("Rubric", 2018)

nor the *Oxford English Dictionary* ("Rubric, n. and adj.", 2018) offer this definition. Diane Ravitch's

EdSpeak (2007, p.186), a dictionary specializing in education jargon, defines this word, but *Shaping the*

Campus Conversation assumes its readers just know (Brown et. al., 2018, p.17).

The primary documents in *Shaping the Campus Conversation* are confusingly arranged. The

Yearly Reports comprise Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of the first section (Results), while Interim Narrative

Reports lie buried in Appendices D, E, and F. These reports come with appendices of their own. The

original application for the Assessment in Action is Appendix C (Brown et. al., 2018, pp. 269-286). The

fact that the Assessment in Action ran out of money and created less than two thirds of its projected

number of librarian-led teams are buried deep in Appendix F (Brown et. al., 2018, p.313).

Worst of all, Lisa J. Hinchcliffe's article "Professional Development for Assessment," remains as

it was when printed straight from Elsevier's database -- in unreadable, six-point type! (Brown et. al.,

2018. pp.207-211; chapter 16).

No doubt, ACRL's Action in Assessment deserves the preservation of ink and paper. Likewise,

some libraries can benefit from mission-aligned assessment with a supportive, honest, and competent

superiors. For librarians looking to learn more about including their chain of command in assessment

efforts, *Shaping the Campus Conversation on Student Learning and Experience*, however, offers little

beyond primary literature and nine enthusiastic accounts. There is no advice for preventing toxic

evaluation or securing trustworthy partners. For library school students and scholars interested in the

assessment movement's roots, this book is complete, but also needlessly difficult. Given its flaws and

omissions, librarians should spend a limited, professional material budget elsewhere.

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