

Understanding the Contributions of the Humanities to Human Development:

A Methodological White Paper



The HULA Research Team
Project Zero
Harvard University
May 15, 2016

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Introduction

Discussions of the humanities in popular media frequently identify the humanities as “under attack.”¹ While humanists have made theoretical arguments about the value of the humanities, relatively little empirical research has focused on understanding the contribution of the humanities to human development. Rigorous tools for assessing the benefits of humanities programs are even less common and those that exist have been borrowed from other fields rather than being built to assess programs in the humanities specifically. The Humanities and Liberal Arts Assessment project (HULA) is an effort to build a base of empirical evidence concerning the value of the humanities and to build tools for assessing humanities programs that are based on the craft practices of humanists. Our goals are both to provide humanists with a better and more explicit understanding of how their own practices “work” as drivers of human development and to provide empirical data about the value of the humanities in the cultivation of human development, preparation of a workforce, and maintenance of a democratic society.

This paper describes HULA’s methodology for analyzing humanist craft practices and developing assessment tools. The first section of the paper outlines a theoretical argument for our approach to studying and building tools for assessment in the humanities. The second section of the paper will describe the methodology that HULA has developed to study the craft logic of humanistic practices in order to build assessments from this understanding. Finally, we offer some brief conclusions about the value of the theoretical frameworks and methodologies described here.

¹ See recent examples from the New York Times (Delany 2013); *The Guardian* (Preston 2015); and *The New Republic* (Reilly et al 2015).

Sec. 1: Theoretical Framework

In this section we argue that assessment tools for the humanities should: 1) focus on the individual acts of educating that are at the core of humanistic practice, 2) be built out of the craft logics of practicing humanists, and 3) account for a “principle of economy” whereby engagement in the humanities encourages development along multiple pathways simultaneously. The first claim is grounded in a distinction between two conceptions of education (Allen 2016a). The second claim is grounded in the recognition that humanistic practice represents the accretion of understanding across millennia of master/apprentice relationships (Allen, Schein, Dean, Kang, Webb, and Walton Doyle 2016). The third claim is grounded in vision of the humanities as a developmental practice that engages, enables, and cultivates multiple intellectual and emotional capacities simultaneously (Allen 2016b).

The Humanities and the Two Conceptions of Education

The HULA project rests on a premise about the nature of education and a corollary concerning the nature of good assessment. The premise builds on a distinction made by John Rawls in his essay “Two Concepts of Rules” (1955) to propose that there are two conceptions of education to which we must attend (Allen, 2016a). The first conception regards education as a system of institutions maintained by a state for utilitarian state purposes. This most commonly articulated utilitarian goals of this social practice include the maintenance of a democratic citizenry, the production of a workforce, and the cultivation of just economic orders. The second conception of education involves the individual acts of teaching conducted within institutions and in which one individual seeks to spur development in another. In this case, the goals cannot be utilitarian, but rather seek to develop the individual for his or her own sake (even if the result also contributes to that societal goal or to an individual’s own utilitarian goals).² These acts focus on the development of the capacity for individual human flourishing along multiple dimensions and attention to this work of individualized, human development establishes a humanistic baseline for understanding the work of education.³ Support for human flourishing becomes the standard for all who are being educated and illuminates how the concepts of education and equity are foundationally intertwined. In order to determine what might be involved in meeting this baseline of development, Allen (2016a) turns to the arguments of Hannah Arendt in *Human Condition* (1958). From Arendt’s ideas of work, labor, and action, Allen derives four basic human potentialities that must be activated to achieve

² See *Education and Equality* (Allen 2016a) for a more thorough discussion of the two conceptions of education.

³ See *Education and Equality* (Allen 2016a) for a more thorough discussion of the humanistic baseline.

the humanistic baseline. These are: to prepare ourselves for non-exploitative bread-winning work, to prepare ourselves for civic and political engagement, to prepare ourselves for creative self-expression and world-making, and to prepare ourselves for rewarding relationships in spaces of intimacy and leisure. These potentialities define the humanistic baseline for education and outline some of the elements that any assessment of education must attend to.

The corollary to the premise that systems of education and individual acts of instruction rest on different justifications and can have distinguishable purposes is that good assessments must attend to both conceptions of education. If education requires attention to individual development, and not just to the accomplishment of societal goals, then any assessment of education must evaluate progress toward the goals of both conceptions of education. Current policy and practice, however, focus attention on assessing progress toward societal goals at the expense of attending to the act of educating itself. This approach is insufficient for developing a full understanding of educational progress. Current policy and practice also habitually introduce tools for assessing the system of education that interfere with individual acts of instruction. In so doing, this approach fails to attend to the humanistic baseline that should frame individual acts of instruction. This approach thereby also violates the principle of equality that is entailed by the humanistic baseline. Attending to the individual acts of education through assessment both supports egalitarian efforts (because it requires that we consider the education of each individual in relation to a broad vision of human flourishing) and provides a more complete evaluation of what is being accomplished in education (because current efforts don't get the full picture since they are overly focused on societal goals). But most importantly, we have to ensure that we have developed assessment tools for each conception of education (education as a system of institutions and education as a practice of person-to-person instruction) that suit that conception without interfering with the other one.

The premise and corollary articulated above are general claims about education and assessment. Applying this logic to the humanities is foundational to HULA. HULA seeks to construct assessment tools for the humanities that attend specifically to the individual acts of educating that occur within the humanities and to the development of the four potentialities of the humanistic baseline. It is the expectation of the research team that assessment that focuses on the human development aspect of education can also contribute to efforts to assess how entire systems of education are performing in relation to societal goals. Two of the four basic needs—for non-exploitative bread-winning work and for civic empowerment—are related to the societal level goals of a successful workforce and citizenry. Thus, it should be possible to connect assessments that focus on the human development aspects of education to assessments that seek to track macro societal goals.

In the summer of 2013, HULA conducted a broad survey of humanities-relevant assessment instruments currently in use in higher education. We have also been working with the organizations in our studies to understand the assessment resources available in the public humanities field. This resulted in two major findings.

First, in state universities and community colleges, assessments are overly oriented toward specific skills or components of skill, for instance of literacy or critical thinking.⁴ These are foundations for capacities that themselves are oriented toward longer-term human development goals. We have not found assessment instruments deployed in this space that successfully connect skill acquisition to assessment of the larger developmental claims of the humanities that relate to components of the humanistic baseline.

Second, in the public humanities context, assessments are largely restricted to audience counts, to counts of event types, to analysis of financial and staffing data, and to post-event satisfaction surveys. In other words, the traditional focus has been on assessment as “monitoring,” rather than on assessment as “evaluation.”⁵ This is true even for those public humanities programs that run seminar or courses or discussion series and not merely one-off events. The Federation of State and Territorial Humanities Councils, which represents the bodies that fund a significant swathe of public humanities programs, has been working to help state humanities councils improve their approaches to assessment. To this end, they have recently asked all state councils to contribute data to the Cultural Data Project, which has recently been renamed as DataArts. This data project captures just these kinds of information (financial information, audience counts, event types, etc.). While these sort of monitorial data are quite useful for tracking investment in the public humanities over time and across states, they don’t actually get at the distinctive impacts of the humanities on human development. In this space, we find very few assessment instruments that track skill and capacity development and very few assessment instruments that connect skill and capacity development to larger developmental claims.⁶ Isolated public humanities programs—for instance, a literature-based discussion series called People and Stories—have been working on shifting from monitoring to evaluation practices, but often without the resources to develop research-based tools.

⁴ HULA catalog of humanities-related assessment instruments. Please contact allen@ethics.harvard.edu for access.

⁵ Research Councils UK 2011 ("[A Guide for Evaluating Public Engagement Activities](#)").

⁶ Research Councils UK 2011 ("[A Guide for Evaluating Public Engagement Activities](#)"); Stern and Seifert 2009 (“Civic Engagement and the Arts: Issues of Conceptualization and Measurement”); Community Tool Box: [Evaluating the Initiative Toolkit](#); Arts Council England: [Toolkits](#).

To develop the next generation of humanities assessments, the HULA team is conducting both basic research projects and translational projects. The research agenda focuses on study of educative acts in the humanities to understand what and how people learn from engagement with the humanities. The translational project entails consulting with public humanities organizations in efforts to develop and refine the assessment tools used by these organizations. While the methodological approaches for these efforts will be described in the second section of this paper, what follows details two core concepts that are essential to HULA's work: craft logic and the principle of economy.

Craft Logic

The first core idea behind HULA is that the humanities are best understood as an assemblage of craft practices handed down from master to apprentice over millennia. As the practices are transferred from one humanist to the next, the master teaches the implicit standards of the craft through example and commentary. The methodological approach of the HULA research protocol rests on the idea that those humanist craft practices have underlying, implicit logics. These craft logics can be conceived of as consisting of four parts: the goals of the craft; the methods used to work toward those goals; the mechanisms through which the methods function, or are believed by humanists to function, to achieve the goals; and the assessment practices that are built into the ordinary functioning of the craft as, for instance, when faculty members grade student papers. These logics can be uncovered and described. The HULA methodology seeks to do just this as part of an effort to develop appropriate tools to assess and evaluate projects in the humanities. Once we recognize the humanities as consisting of craft practices with implicit internal logics, it becomes possible to foster a conversation about assessment on the basis of materials from the crafts themselves, rather than by importing assessment frameworks from other contexts. This presents a departure from the dominant approach, where strategies for assessment are often imported to the humanities from other fields.⁷

The Principle of Economy

The second core idea behind HULA is that the humanities operate with a principle of economy. Humanistic pedagogy and participant engagement can operate on many different learning pathways simultaneously, and foster human development along multiple dimensions simultaneously.

⁷ We are not arguing that it is never appropriate to draw on work done in other disciplines (HULA actually draws significantly on the tools of cognitive psychology in assessment development), but we are making the case that the use of these tools must be justified (as being valid) through claims that are grounded in the work of humanists themselves.

In our framework, the process of human development begins with inputs that we take in through our senses or conjure up through our memory. In the humanities, those inputs may be verbal, visual, aural, kinesthetic, or behavioral. Everything, in other words, other than the quantitative (although number, too, is a form of language). Having taken in some sort of stimuli, we process those stimuli with any or all of the following processing capacities: cognitive capacities, whether analytical or imaginative; metacognitive capacities (this is the capacity to think about how we think); affective or emotional capacities; intersubjective capacities (these are the ones that hone our relational or interpersonal skills); or our kinesthetic capacities (this is the capacity to activate physicality for higher-order intellectual or emotional goals. For instance, perhaps I go for a run to help me straighten out my thinking on a given subject; the rhythm of the running helps me bring order to my thoughts).

This processing work generates results. Some are short-term, namely, the development of skills or second-order capacities. Examples would include outcomes from literacy to creativity to resilience; a full list can be found in the chart below. Some results are long-term, taking the form of shaping the longer developmental arc of a life and meeting the four basic needs described above. We could divide those long-term results, roughly, among the existential, the vocational, and the civic. Take the existential as identifying the long term development of our experience as an individual, our sense of identity and subjectivity, and our experience of intimate relationships. Take the vocational as identifying the long term development of our competence to fend for ourselves economically. And take the civic as identifying the arc of our development as people who participate in organizational and political communities—local, national, or global.

Here’s a chart of that schema:

Input	Processing	Short-term Result	Long-term Result
Verbal Visual Aural Kinesthetic-Receptive Behavioral-Modeling Memory	Cognitive-Analytical Cognitive-Imaginative Metacognitive Affective Intersubjective Kinesthetic-Expressive	Literacy-Basic Literacy-Advanced Critical Thinking Understanding Appreciation Creativity Practical Judgment Communicative Skill Kinesthetic-Developmental Personality Factors	Existential Vocational Civic

Figure 1. Humanities and Liberal Arts Assessment Coding Schema

Now a learning pathway is a process in which teachers and students focus on a subset of inputs, some particular modes of processing those inputs, and some short-term and long-term goals for that processing work. For instance, a teacher in a political philosophy class might engage students in a lot of close reading (a verbal input). She might emphasize the analytical work done by the students in the class by asking them to focus on logical argumentation (a choice to emphasize the analytical aspect of cognition for the processing). She might do this, seeking to cultivate “understanding” in the students of key political concepts and how they relate to living political practice, her short-term goal. She expects that equipping her students with this sort of understanding will make them better civic agents. The long-term result she seeks is, in the first instance, civic, even if there is also an existential flavor to what she hopes to give her students. She believes, for instance, that efficacy as a civic actor strengthens their sense of individual identity. We could map the learning pathway she deploys thus:

Input	Processing	Short-term Result	Long-term Result
Verbal Visual Aural Kinesthetic-Receptive Behavioral-Modeling Memory	Cognitive-Analytical Cognitive-Imaginative Metacognitive Affective Intersubjective Kinesthetic-Expressive	Literacy-Basic Literacy-Advanced Critical Thinking Understanding Appreciation Creativity Practical Judgment Communicative Skill Kinesthetic-Developmental Personality Factors	Existential Vocational Civic

Figure 2. A learning pathway

On this schema, 1080 distinct learning pathways are possible, if, that is, instructors focus on only one input, only one processing capacity, only one short-term result, and only one long-term result. For a partial representation of the explosion of possibilities, consider this:

Input	Processing	Short-term Result	Long-term Result
Verbal Visual Aural Kinesthetic-Receptive Behavioral-Modeling Memory	Cognitive-Analytical Cognitive-Imaginative Metacognitive Affective Intersubjective Kinesthetic-Expressive	Literacy-Basic Literacy-Advanced Critical Thinking Understanding Appreciation Creativity Practical Judgment Communicative Skill Kinesthetic-Developmental Personality Factors	Existential Vocational Civic

Figure 3. The multiplicity of possible learning pathways

Yet as we all know, no instructor focuses his efforts in such a thoroughly streamlined fashion, and this is both because individual students have multiple needs and because different students have different needs. One student in that political philosophy class may need a lot of work on the quality of his logical argumentation. Another, however, may be quite good at that but not very good at the sorts of intersubjective skills that facilitate discussions with other students. A third may need to develop metacognitive skills, habits of reflection on her learning style, in order to strengthen her level of engagement with the material, an affective goal. The good instructor will find himself switching learning pathways accordingly, as an individual student's multiple needs become apparent to him and as different students differing needs manifest themselves. In other words, the number of combinatorial pathways is so vast it's not even clear that it is worth enumerating their total number. Here is where the efficiency of the humanities comes in. Instruction in the humanities is not restricted to a single pathway, but has the capacity to engage the students along multiple pathways simultaneously. Not only is this efficient, but the complexity of the learning pathways engaged makes the humanities a powerful educational approach. When good teachers are at work, teaching in the humanities can develop students in all of the ways sketched above, and it can also do many of these things at the same time, whether in a single student or across groups of students. The HULA research project rests on the idea that the humanities have been so durable, across millennia, precisely because they are a remarkably economical or efficient approach to fostering human development fully understood.

Sec. 2: Methodological Framework

Our approach to uncovering craft logic and subsequently developing tools for their assessment involves close analysis of humanistic craft practice through study of the artifacts of humanistic craft practice. The HULA team works by focusing on particular humanistic projects (Examples: grants funded by the Illinois Humanities Council or the work of People and Stories/Gente y Cuentos) and gathering an archive of artifacts from that project. Archives are analyzed in a multi-staged process (described below), which leverages the tools of qualitative thematic analysis to 1) describe the craft logic implicit in the craft practice of the archive and 2) to develop testable hypotheses about learning pathways through which the humanistic craft cultivates human development.

This approach analyzes the data in a way that does not essentialize humanistic craft but recognizes that it functions in accord with the “principle of economy.” Since a single humanistic learning experience can lead to development of a variety of capacities through multiple pathways and might function differently for different persons, we seek to capture the multiple learning pathways that characterize any given project or archive. To achieve this, we allow for emergent codes and double coding of archive excerpts (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

Once humanistic learning pathways have been identified and described in the language of the humanities, we conduct a translational exercise. We look for constructs in psychology that capture the same, related, or overlapping ideas to those that emerge from the study of the humanities archives. Subsequent stages of analysis leverage those constructs and the tools of psychology more generally to identify and utilize currently existing metrics that could be used to test the learning pathway hypotheses generated in the earlier stages of analysis. These metrics can be used either as frameworks for further research analysis or as the basis of assessment instruments for practitioners. In the former case, this creates a mixed methods approach to understanding and describing the logics of humanistic craft within the archive under study. In the latter case, practitioners gain access to simple but effective tools for evaluating the impact of their programs on participants.

In what follows, we first describe our analytic approach, and its components: qualitative thematic analysis; elements of craft; folk learning theories; developmental pathways; and mechanisms at work. We then turn to the outcomes of our analysis and the assessment tools that can be developed on the basis of this work.

Analytic Approaches

In order to uncover and learn from the implicit craft logic of humanistic practice, we gather, code, and analyze the work products of master humanists—including grant proposals for public

programs, program and lesson plans, examples of student work or event experience, teacher’s comments on student work and participation, and so on. We use these archives of material as the basis for a five-stage analytical strategy. After (1) qualitative thematic analysis,⁸ we use the material (2) to understand the elements of humanistic craft; (3) to identify humanistic folk learning theories; (4) to identify developmental pathways pursued by humanists; and (5) to identify the “mechanisms at work” along those developmental pathways and to connect assessment instruments to those. Stages 2, 3, and 5 provide HULA with data that can be helpful to professional humanists in further developing their craft. The relationship between these elements is illustrated below. These analytical tasks provide a framework for the construction of assessment instruments. This section will provide a detailed description of each stage of analysis.

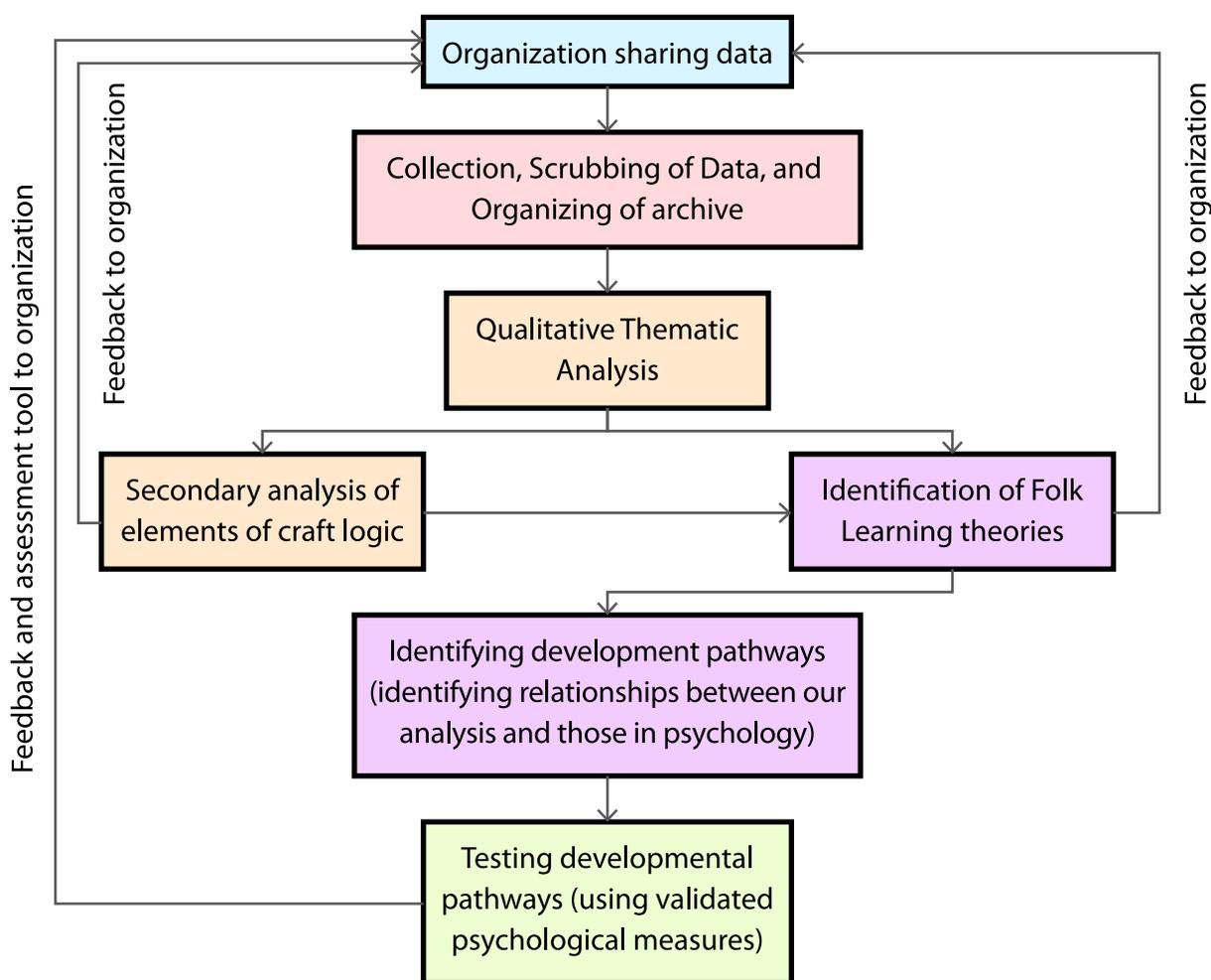


Figure 4. HULA Workflow Diagram

⁸ The team was trained in Howard Gardner’s Project Zero lab and modeled its research methods after the methods of that lab. The team also drew on Miles & Huberman (1994) and Strauss and Corbin (2008).

Qualitative Thematic Analysis

Artifacts gathered from partner organizations are initially examined using qualitative thematic analysis to identify patterns related to aspects of humanist craft logic (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Thematic analysis is an approach to qualitative data that involves the identifications of a priori and emergent “themes” within data. Data in the HULA archives are coded in relation to these themes. Coding involves the identification of excerpts from archive materials that provide evidence related to themes identified in the coding structure (for examples, please see Allen et al 2016). This process allows researchers to bring together all evidence related to a particular theme for further analysis.

Themes and their related codes are identified in two ways. A priori codes are developed prior to any interaction with the data and are based on prior theoretical or empirical work. HULA’s a priori scheme was developed through analysis of readings in the philosophy and psychology of education as well as in the sociology of craft (see bibliography) and is designed to identify evidence related to the goals, methods, and mechanisms in each artifact with regard to their relation to the perceptual domains engaged, psychological capacities deployed, types of intellectual and personality development sought, and types of human development sought. Intellectual/personality development refers to the development of the human mind, specifically, and to the development of character. Human development refers to the development of the whole person in relation to the four basic needs that constitute the humanistic baseline for education. By connecting specific types of skills and psychological capacities developed through humanities instruction and experience to the longer term goals of the humanistic baseline, we are able to identify the learning pathways of humanistic craft. Emergent themes are those that arise through the research team’s interaction with the data and identify themes that are not present in the a priori system of coding.

In the coding process, the HULA team first applies the a priori coding scheme to a subset of artifacts in the archive and uses the results to refine the a priori coding structure and determine if any emergent codes are warranted. Once the team is satisfied that the code structure effectively captures all relevant themes, the team norms around the finalized structure to ensure inter-rater reliability, and then codes the entire archive.

It is important to note here that qualitative thematic analysis relies on the concepts of saturation, inter-rater reliability, and triangulation to ensure the validity of analysis. Saturation is the idea that a theme is only sufficiently articulated when continued review of new data provides no new insights into the theme. Inter-rater reliability is a measure of the degree of alignment/agreement in how different researchers are applying the system of codes to the data.

Lastly, triangulation involves applying the code system to data from a variety of sources in order to ensure that all types of data are telling the same “story.” A qualitative researcher generally considers conclusions to be more valid if they are based on analysis of a variety of sources (e.g. based on interviews, document analysis, and observations rather than interviews alone).⁹

In this stage of the process, the HULA team also labels each artifact with a set of descriptors that allow the team to further reorganize data for secondary analysis. These descriptors include demographics of the project that the artifact relates to, who produced the artifact, the date of the artifact, the genre of the artifact, etc. This allows, for example, the team to examine the relationships among learning pathways and other factors: the demographic characteristics of the students; the generic or historical characteristics of the artifact, and so on.

Once the archive has been coded using qualitative thematic analysis, the archive can be organized in a variety of ways that facilitate two modes of secondary analysis that are processed in parallel. The first is a deeper analysis of each element of craft logic and the second is the identification of folk learning theories. Both provide an opportunity for direct feedback to the partner organization and the identification of folk learning theories is a critical step in the development of assessment tools.

Elements of Craft

The elements of the humanist’s craft include goals, methods, causal explanations for why the methods should work (mechanisms), and assessment practices. We analyze these elements of craft for each program that we study by using the codes applied during thematic analysis to gather all pieces of evidence related to each category and conduct a secondary level of analysis using a grounded approach to identify emergent themes within each element of craft logic (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). This analysis permits us to capture the expertise developed by humanists through the evolution of their practice over time. This aspect of our analysis also permits us to report back to a program on the content of their goals, methods, causal explanations, and assessment practices, identifying strengths and weaknesses. In reporting back, we adopt the elements of participatory action research frameworks for working with communities outside the academy (Fals Borda and Rahaman 1991). Rather than treating our archive donors as objects of study, they become partners in the study, and we seek to provide them with the data and tools that they need to answer their own questions.

⁹ On triangulation, please see Miles et al 2013, 299-300. On saturation, please see Strauss ad Corbin 2008

For example, in our grounded analysis of a 30-year archive of successful grant applications to the Illinois Humanities Council, we found that evidence about the mechanisms of proposed projects fell into two large categories. The first group of claims focused on the inputs required to make projects successful. These claims explained how experience (a person or institution’s record of engagement in similar projects or relevant practices) and expertise (a person or institution’s mastery of a subject or discipline) play a role in the creation of a successful project (i.e. one where the grantee’s goals would be achieved). These input claims also focused on explaining the mechanisms underlying methods for generating motivation to engage in the event or project.

The second broad group of claims focused on explaining the mechanisms that were expected to convert engagement into accomplishment of the grantee’s goals - these can be considered outcome mechanisms. These included claims that the public humanities programs achieved their goals through methods that contextualized current understanding, provided novel perspectives, offered insights into complex subjects, provided intersubjective opportunities, used the arts to portray an analytic subject/analyze an artistic subject, or provided opportunities to participate in a creative/analytic act. Figure 5 illustrates the relationship between these types of claims about the mechanisms underlying methods employed by successful applicants to the Illinois Humanities Council over a 30-year period.

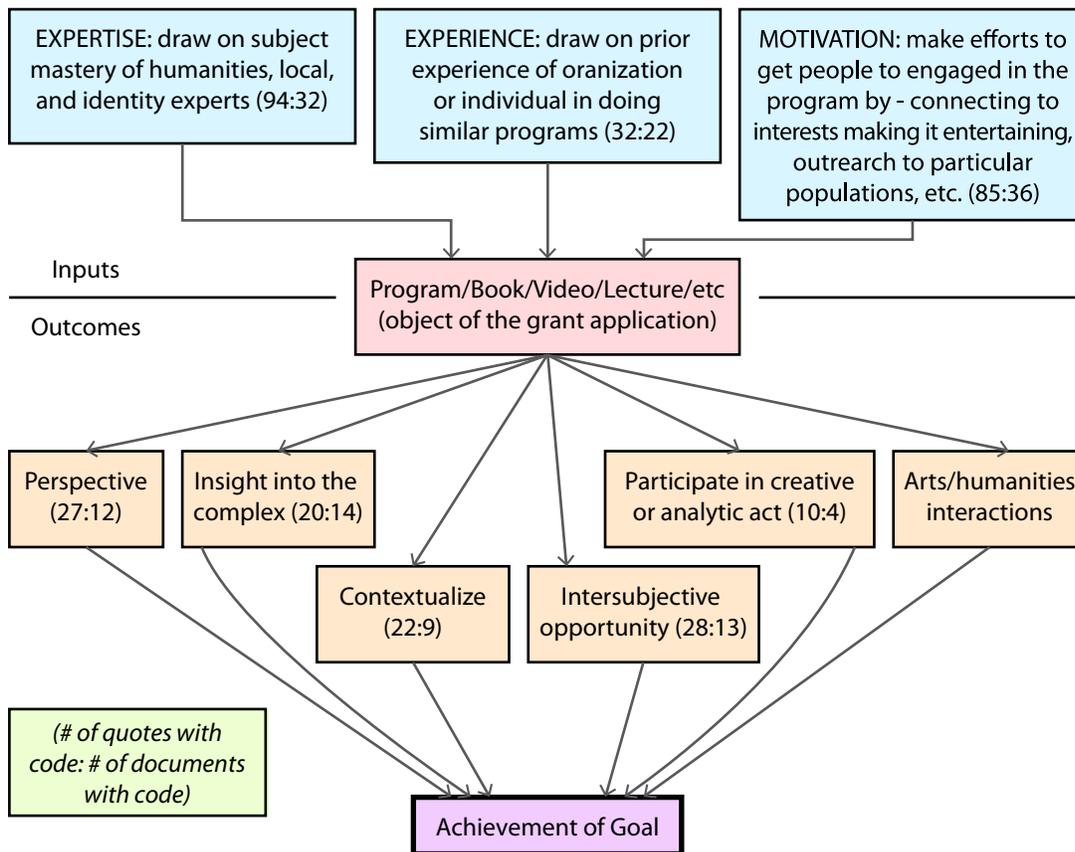


Figure 5. Analysis of Mechanisms Operating in Public Humanities Programs Funded by Illinois Humanities Council

The analysis of craft elements can also be conducted as it is related to other characteristics of the data. For example, using the descriptors applied during the initial qualitative thematic analysis, the team can home in on only those mechanisms, goals, methods, or assessment methods that are connected to particular racial or socioeconomic group in order to examine how humanists work differently (or in the same way) with different demographic groups. Or we could choose to focus only on elements of craft logic that relate to particular types of goals for human development, such as focusing on the methods humanists use to develop civic goals.

Folk Learning Theories

In addition to analyzing the elements of craft logic in isolation, the thematic analysis allows us to create a map of the learning theories used by humanists. We identify these as “folk learning” theories because they have been developed as part of the craft practices of humanists and are often implied in the practice of humanists, rather than being articulated explicitly through cognitive science or psychology. These theories are identified by examining the data to see how elements of craft logic “track” together. In other words, we examine the data to see how the goals, methods, and mechanisms relate to one another and if certain types of goals are pursued using a similar set of methods and if these methods are explained by similar mechanisms. This element of our work helps the leaders of humanities programs see what they are doing by illuminating implicit patterns within the craft logic of their practice.

As an example, in the case of the work of Illinois Humanities Council grantees, we have identified the following six folk learning theories:

Major Learning Theories:

1. Cultivating Understanding through Analysis and the Verbal Arts for Civic Goals
2. Cultivating Understanding through Imaginative and Multi-media Engagement for Civic Goals
3. Cultivating Appreciation, by focusing on Motivation, for Civic Goals

Minor Learning Theories:

1. Cultivating Creativity through Imaginative Engagement for Existential Goals
2. Cultivating Critical Thinking through Analysis and the Verbal Arts for Civic Goals
3. Cultivating Understanding through Analysis and Visual Engagement for Civic Goals

The first major folk learning theory, “Cultivating Understanding through Analysis and the Verbal Arts for Civic Goals” was identified because a large number of projects approach a similar goal with similar methods and mechanisms. In this case, the learning theory is characterized by projects that primarily seek to achieve civic goals of human development by undertaking projects that use the verbal arts to engage participants in analytical activity with the aim of deepening their understanding of history, others, or themselves. That is, the humanists engaged in these projects appear to be guided by an implicit understanding that engaging people in analytic work using the verbal arts will develop their understanding of a particular subject and help them develop as actors in the civic/political sphere.

Developmental Pathways

Once we have identified the learning theories employed by particular humanities programs and have studied their elements of craft, we are in a position to identify the developmental pathways that they are employing. By developmental pathway, we refer to the series of causal connections that a humanist expects will lead to the outcomes for participants that are sought by the program. For instance, one set of programs among Illinois Humanities Council grantees focused on engaging participants in verbal arts and analytical work, in order to cultivate “understanding” to help participants develop as civic actors. To understand this pathway, we need to understand how verbal engagement connects to understanding and, in turn, how understanding connects to civic preparation. Having identified these questions, we then turn to psychology in order to see what answers it has to these questions about human development. In this case, one developmental pathway we have identified, for which there is support in the psychological literature, is as follows:

**Experiences of Insight → Lower Need for Cognitive Closure (Higher Need for Cognition)
→ More complex perceptions of group identity → Greater Sense of Community**

Of course, more than one developmental pathway might support the movement from the achievement of understanding, through engagement with the verbal arts and analysis to success as a civic actor. By identifying a range of developmental pathways that might explain the success of the learning theory employed by a particular humanities program, we offer the leaders of humanities programs a framework for self-identifying the developmental pathway that best captures what they are trying to do. They can then focus their assessment energies here.

Mechanisms at Work

Each developmental pathway consists of a set of “mechanisms at work.” A mechanism is a cause-effect relationship that explains why the application of a given method has its specific result. In order to understand the impacts of humanities programs on participants, one needs to identify the mechanisms that are understood to bring about those impacts. Identifying mechanisms and developmental pathways makes it possible to connect short-term outcomes to longer-term goals. For instance, if a program hopes to generate more effective civic actors or to contribute to social cohesion, one way of assessing its success, as per the developmental pathway sketched above, might be to assess how well its programs produce insight for participants and reduce their need for cognitive closure.

In other words, humanities programs might conduct their assessment of their practices by identifying “leading indicators” that would be good evidence that their participants are indeed on the pathway toward the long-term goal that is at stake. This approach solves the problem that plagues humanities assessment, namely that the sought-after outcomes manifest themselves so long after the “intervention” (the course or program or lecture) that it is analytically nearly impossible to tie the outcomes back to the program and the late arriving data points can’t be used to improve the program itself at the time of its administration and application.

The mechanisms we identify are psychologically validated constructs that can be assessed via survey questions. Consequently, organizations can build their assessment instruments on the basis of survey questions that the field of psychology has made available.

New Assessment Tools

The above analytical steps permit us to build innovative assessment instruments for humanities programs. Thus far, our focus has been on building such new tools for public humanities programs. In developing assessment tools, we shift focus away from common practice in two ways.

First, we focus on assessing education not at a system level, the first concept of education, but rather at the level of individual acts of teaching conducted within institutions and in which one individual seeks to spur development in another. In other words, our assessment work focuses on developing tools to assess education understood on the second conception of education, as outlined above.

Second, we shift focus from monitoring to evaluation. Rather than focusing on audience counts and organizational metrics, we focus on the actual content of programming and its effect on participants. Out of three possible types of evaluation—formative, process/implementation, and summative—we focus on summative evaluation. We seek to understand the summative impact of the program on participants. Our framework gives the leaders of public humanities programs insight into the work they have done to date, as well as a structure for self-identifying the developmental pathway(s) their programs emphasize. On this basis, they can then select sets of survey questions to use with participants to assess how well they are meeting their targets with regard to the leading indicators that should confirm that they are making effective progress toward their long term goals for the development of participants or students.

Our process also provides important feedback to organizations with regard to the methods, mechanisms, and goals that are a part of the organization’s work. Typically, these aspects of the humanist’s craft function implicitly – the humanists are guided by a deep but implicit understanding of “what works” that has been passed along through master/apprentice relationships for decades, in the case of specific organizations, and generations, in the case of disciplines. Our process helps to make these elements explicit and our descriptions of the types of goals, methods, and mechanisms that a program employs, as well as the “learning theories” that the program works on are reported back to the organization whose data we have analyzed. This allows the leadership of public humanities programs: 1) to evaluate better their effectiveness in achieving their goals; 2) to know better what they “know”; and 3) to make stronger arguments about how their programs impact participants, lead to valuable learning, and advance human development goals.

Conclusion

The HULA research project represents a methodological breakthrough both in efforts to understand teaching and learning that occur within the context of humanistic disciplines and in efforts to develop strategies for assessing the impact of the humanities on human development. The breakthrough rests on theoretical insights: the two conceptions of education; the existence of craft logics in humanistic disciplines; and the principle of economy as defining of humanistic pedagogy. These insights made it possible for us to identify core elements of humanistic pedagogy: elements of craft; folk learning theories; developmental pathways; and mechanisms at work.

Taken together, the theoretical insights and identifiable elements of humanistic craft provide the materials for a framework that permits meaningful formalization of pedagogic work in the humanities. This formalization is anchored in understandings of humanistic practices that are internal to the humanistic disciplines themselves, but the formalization also permits connecting humanistic self-understandings to the intellectual and analytical resources of other disciplines, most importantly psychology.

The HULA methodology should give practitioners of the humanities abundant new resources for explaining what they do, assessing their practices, and defending their value.

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