



**Innovative pedagogies series:
Co-creating a social justice and
education curriculum with
undergraduate students**

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A distinctive and innovative element of learning and teaching in my pedagogic practice

My aim has been to transform teaching from something that is controlled by the lecturer, something that is 'done to' the students into something that is co-created between lecturer and student. Student engagement has been pushed to the forefront of higher education (HE). For me this is a matter of social justice and of pedagogic excellence. Alexander's (2000) definition of pedagogy underpins this distinctive element of my practice: "Pedagogy connects the apparently self-contained act of teaching with culture, structure and the mechanisms of social control" (2000, p. 540).

In doing so I also want to question structures of knowledge, power and expertise in the university, celebrate the life experiences of students, give them confidence to embrace learning and help them understand the learning outcomes and assessment methods. My practice shifts pedagogic design away from the traditional university approach that focuses on lecturer transmission of content and alignment with assessment. This work is within the andragogic and humanistic traditions where the social is something to be transcended through empowering pedagogies. In this way the work reflects the view that education can lead to greater self-awareness so that students do not feel marginalized or inclined to adopt a false self (Mann 2010). My own research has shown that traditional pedagogic practice can be particularly alienating for Black and minority ethnic (BME) and working class students (Hall, Peat and Craig 2014).

Pedagogic design

I have had responsibility for a module called Social Justice in Education on the BA Education programme at the University of Roehampton. Rather than starting with the content students need to know, my design starts with the students' experiences and with an interrogation of learning outcomes by the students allowing them to explore those aspects of their experiences which might provide evidence of meeting those outcomes. This does not mean that my module is content free – the learning outcomes make clear those issues, concepts and debates students must show evidence of understanding. I have come to understand that students, who take this module in the first year of an undergraduate BA, have a wealth of life experiences that if shared and explored provide the heart of the content. In sharing and interrogating these experiences together, students, particularly those who might be mature students, or first in family at university, gain confidence through bringing their life world into the university and begin to grapple with the expectations of undergraduate study and assessment. This is based on the view that curriculum development activities encompass three aspects of student engagement: learning and teaching, student identity and governance (Trowler and Trowler 2010). The design also recognizes that study is already going on in the lives of students, including when they walk into a classroom and before they start a university course. This course is more about the helping students understand the craft of higher education by studying with people rather than teaching through transmitting content.

I begin the 12-week course in the second half of the first year with two weeks of activities that unpick and interrogate the learning outcomes. In doing so I also challenge students to decide how they might provide evidence that they have met the learning outcomes at various levels. The activities invite students to offer their own experiences as case studies to enable the class to explore key issues and concepts in social justice in education. In this way we co-create the next eight weeks of the curriculum, leaving two weeks at the end for students to work on the assessment tasks they have chosen to provide their evidence of learning. Some usually decide to submit a traditional essay but others may present evidence orally or through a film, blog or even a poster that can be shared in these final weeks.

1. Example module

Module week	Lecture	Seminars
1-2	Introductory lectures – how the module operates, learning outcomes and key theoretical perspectives and issues	Small group activities to begin sharing issues and stories. Small group activities to interrogate learning outcomes and consider stories and issues as evidence of meeting the outcomes. Sharing examples of previous assessed work and asking students to assess it. Deciding which student topics will be used to underpin lecture schedule
3-10	Lectures interrogating key topics shaped by students examples and stories	Student topics explored, materials provided by student can include audio, newspaper articles or presentation. Often underpinned by a dialogue sheet*.
11	Tutorials on assessment	Student posters, presentations and films
12	Tutorials on assessment	Student posters, presentations and films

*For more information on dialogue sheets see:

<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/Using%20student%20dialogue%20sheets%20to%20inspire%20teaching-Handout.pdf>

Contexts

Disciplinary

The spring semester module is called Social Justice in Education and is one of the first year compulsory modules on BA Education. This is a large programme and thus the module could have 300 students on it, split into ten groups of 30 for seminar sessions each week, following the large group lecture. BA Education at University of Roehampton is a popular programme and one that attracts a wide range of students, many from non-traditional higher education backgrounds and many mature students. More than half of the cohort is BME allowing for a rich mix of experiences and perspectives. Given the research evidence around issues such as the attainment of BME students in schools and universities, a module that speaks to issues of social justice and education often resonates with personal experiences.

Institutional

The University of Roehampton has a particular and historical commitment to working in partnership with students and to social justice and education. BA Education sits in Froebel College with its roots in a humanist approach to education. The University strategic plan includes an aim to be one of the top universities for student satisfaction by 2015 and NSS satisfaction rates have risen from 75% to 86% since 2012.

Students regularly engage in governance, enhancement and assurance processes. The University has a Student Senate with its own annual budget and has contributed to good practice examples to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), Higher Education Academy (HEA) and National Union of Students (NUS). However as in most universities, with curriculum development at the module level there remains the traditional notion of something developed by experts and delivered to novices albeit with student feedback at the validation event.

Almost half of the students at the university are BME and are the first in their family to engage with higher education. Institutionally, the university is committed to closing the attainment gap so prevalent across higher education and was involved in the HEA/Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) National Summit programme in 2011 and project initiatives that followed. Our research has indicated the importance of welcoming students

into the learning community, addressing exclusionary practices that make some feel like outsiders and working with students as partners to develop clear expectations and assessment criteria. The pedagogic design described in this paper aims to address a number of the research findings from these BME attainment projects and in doing so ensure an engaging learning experience for all.

National

Student engagement has become one of the areas regularly measured in universities by the QAA. Students are expected to take part in a wide range of enhancement and assurance mechanisms (QAA 2012). In parallel since the imposition of student fees, some have argued that relationships between students and universities are being transformed, becoming more market and consumer orientated. This design aims to counteract a consumerist approach that sees student engagement in terms of the provision of feedback on the university offer by passive students, the management of complaints or narrowly defined student consultation. The design is closer to the QAA's (2012) wider definition of student engagement that situates the learning experience as a kind of co-creation between students and universities (Streeting and Wise 2009). This speaks to my values base, my research into the attainment of BME students in higher education and directly challenges consumerist approaches to higher education.

Nationally, there has been an interest in co-creation with students in recent years with the HEA itself funding projects (such as Lincoln's 'Student as Producer' and Exeter's 'Students as Partners' projects) to encourage students to see themselves as partners in their learning and wider university experience. Nationally, student engagement in curriculum design has focused on links between curriculum and research-led/research-engaged teaching or the co-creation of shared materials using technology.

Evidence of impact

Impact on students

Student module evaluations indicate there has been an impact on students' appreciation of the module design. The module is regularly rated at the highest level. Qualitative comments such as these from are typical:

It was interesting hearing everyone's views, students and staff; it seems like change is possible and will happen! This way of working makes me think that anything is possible and has inspired me to achieve my potential. Not only that but straight away afterwards the head of department invited us to repeat the exercise with her senior team so that others could hear about it. *(Winifred, undergraduate student 2013)*

I was lucky enough to have Julie as a lecturer in my first year. At first glance it wasn't a subject I was interested in but the way Julie approached it and us all as individuals captured my interest and it turned out to be one of my favourite and most successful modules. Julie's passion is contagious and I engaged with the topics because of it. She was a lecturer who really cared and had an interest in us all as people. I wanted my work to reflect the respect I had for her. I am now a teacher in a secondary school and Julie's approach underpins the way I work with my students. *(Heather, undergraduate mature student 2007-10)*

When I was asked to present my experiences of working in a pupil referral unit I was terrified but looking back I'm so glad I did it and I learnt so much from the seminar discussion. *(Deanna, undergraduate student 2012)*

Assessment results have also improved with more students gaining higher marks. In addition, more students are continuing after the first year and more are choosing a social justice pathway through the BA programme in second and third years.

A number of students have gone on to secure competitive internships and summer placements on the basis of the work in this module. This is a module where students bond very quickly and form lasting friendships. It is a module where single mothers, for example, discover they are not alone.

I have to admit that each year some students, especially early on are dismayed to see that this is not teacher-led, and passive approaches to learning will not suffice. Some too, when faced with the choice of assessed evidence, worry and want to be told what to do. I resist this as I believe that, coming at the end of the first year, this is a crucial step in students becoming independent learners who will succeed in year two.

Impact on academic colleagues

This kind of module can be exciting and transformative but it can also ask a lot of academic colleagues. Some have found the late notice around the curriculum design unsettling while others have embraced the looser structure and student involvement.

Some colleagues report that their eyes have been opened in terms of understanding how much help first year students need to understand both learning outcomes and how they might evidence that they have met them. Many have agreed that this is not usually something we give much attention to. However, I understand that I am asking people to replace traditional content time with time to learn how to learn at university. Some colleagues have needed to be convinced that this is time well spent.

Many of the student presentations have been wonderful. Many are quite emotional and some are controversial. We are regularly humbled by the powerful stories people are able to share and it amazes us that these life stories remained hidden in the past. Additionally, students regularly surprise us with sophisticated films, in-depth research and even poems that capture the issue.

Assessment is varied and this asks a lot of colleagues. It has resulted in rich debate about whether, for example, a presentation is equivalent to a piece of writing and whether the craft in designing a film can mask engagement with literature. On the other hand, as a team, there is valuable discussion when we are moderating work.

The story of how the practice developed

The issue I was attempting to address

Some years ago I realised that like many academics I had focused on delivering content and that I had been nervous about engaging students, especially those from non-traditional backgrounds. When I had invited students to take part in discussions often in the seminar sessions, conversation was often stilted and many students did not take part. I also realized that just providing an environment to share experiences was not, in itself, enough for higher education learning to take place. I had noticed too that students struggled to understand what was expected and were often very conservative in those topics they presented for assessment, rarely making connections to their own life experiences. I wanted a method for interrogating the craft of doing higher education study while recognizing that study happens beyond the university classroom. I also recognized that many of the students in my classes had more experience of social justice in education than I had – if only I could encourage them to speak out and share.

The rich multi-cultural environment of my early teaching career had taught me the value of dialogic approaches to learning. Many of the students had far more experience than I, the so called expert. On one powerful occasion early in my career, students gave presentations on an aspect of their life which had shaped their view of society. The most stirring, came not from the traditionally high achieving students but from those students who, in other teaching situations, were less confident. Their presentations turned the usual classroom dynamics on their head. These were students who had fled war-torn countries with their families, who had led pro-democracy campaigns in dangerous situations, and who had worked as nurses and

engineers in developing countries, often learning English at the same time. Others were local students struggling as single parents in difficult conditions. Many went on to achieve the highest grades possible. These presentations became a defining experience in my professional life, one which has driven my commitment to student engagement and equality.

Some years ago I was involved in Roehampton's Centre for Excellence in Teaching Learning (CETL) in Social Justice and Education. My work on the CETL involved designing a radical module to be delivered across the whole university. We called the module Questioning Citizenship, and designed it to be flexible enough to be nuanced for every academic programme and for every student to reflect on notions of citizenship in relation to their life experiences and their chosen discipline.

Taking on the Social Justice in Education module after the demise of Questioning Citizenship and the CETL, I aimed to address the issues mentioned above by inviting the students to shape the curriculum with me building on the CETL good practice.

The existing practice I wanted to change

The widening participation agenda has raised questions about pedagogies and the ways they might be developed to address issues of inclusion and diversity. Too often, over-simplified notions of the traditional and non-traditional students hinder the development of truly inclusive pedagogies (Craig, Hall and Peat 2010). These oversimplified notions include seeing non-traditional students as deficient, lacking in the cultural capital, or learning behaviours to help them excel in higher education. Often such students report a feeling of alienation, a lack of opportunity to be themselves or share their life experiences in the classroom. I wanted to change the way content knowledge around educational concepts and issues was communicated to learners. I wanted to make it more open and accessible. I also wanted to move away from an assumption that students would pick up the expectations of higher education study and help facilitate the construction of knowledge in a deep and meaningful way, which recognized life outside of my expertise, located in the worlds of the students. My practice has been about both contesting what knowledge in higher education is and making the expectations within higher education study accessible

For me, it is unreasonable to expect that students intuitively know how to study at undergraduate level or understand traditional university academic conventions. A reflective and responsible approach to learning is the one traditionally valued and rewarded in higher education, but how we convey this to a diverse student body, whose experiences of education before entering the academy may have been unrewarding, unchallenging and 'surface' is an aspect rarely overtly alluded to. The jargon students encounter, considered common in academia may, in fact, alienate some, despite implicit references in course material, which may remain unnoticed by students unfamiliar with academic discourses.

Previously I had seen HE learning as levels of learning progressing in terms of complexity, from the basic taking in of information to the interpretation, understanding and application of it (Bloom et al. 1956). I came to see that providing information for students then assessing their application of it regardless of their life experiences was inappropriate and dated pedagogic practice. I aimed to change a 'front loaded model' of education towards a more participatory more facilitated and situated pedagogic practice.

While articulating a frustration that students seemed unable or reluctant to engage critically with academic knowledge, my own observations in both lectures and seminar sessions indicated a limited range of pedagogic practices with most involving more 'teacher talk' than student participation. The student-centred learning that was observed regularly resulted in rather bland discussions and limited engagement. In many cases student interaction was fairly limited with many students remaining quite quiet. Space for student-centred learning can result in a tokenistic, surface approach, which fails to connect with students' former experiences, ideas or identities.

Before I re-designed this module to be more authentically student centred, it typically ran as ten weeks of lectures each addressing an issue or a theoretical lens through which to analyse an aspect of social justice in

education. It had been taught by experts with a psychological research perspective, a philosophical perspective, and a sociological perspective in different years.

The catalyst: What practices did I plan to change? What were the challenges?

I planned to change the practices involved in:

- > preparing and delivering lectures;
- > debating issues and concepts in the seminars;
- > student engagement in learning outcomes and assessment;
- > curriculum design.

Preparing and delivering lectures

In the past, 11 one-hour lectures were prepared and delivered by the module leader. Each lecture covered an aspect of the curriculum such as 'Assessment' or a conceptual lens through which to view an issue such as 'Feminist Perspectives on Secondary Education'. Students would listen while the lecture was presented and then the seminar would address the topic usually supported by a journal article or sometimes a video clip. The learning outcomes were shared in the first lecture but then never addressed again. I changed this to a more a fluid design. We started with two weeks of lectures which examined the learning outcomes, key issues and the expectations of the module in detail. This was followed by lectures addressing topics chosen by students in the first two weeks of seminars, illustrated with student stories, student generated films or even students in dialogue. As a team we had to be confident that we could facilitate critical debate while embracing students' own experiences.

Debating issues and concepts in the seminars

Previously academic colleagues had led the seminars. Some student evaluations had described these as mini-lectures with little chance for student contribution. Students were often given journal articles to read, few read them and discussion was limited. In my design students led the seminars. They discussed issues and experiences in the first two weeks and agreed those they would examine further in the weeks that followed. Students volunteered to tell their story or bring resources to discuss an issue that had affected them. In each seminar, the role of the academic was to facilitate the sharing and prompt students to use a range of perspectives to analyse the issue. Rather than focusing on content, the seminar required academic colleagues to pay attention to practices that welcomed and celebrated the widest student engagement while developing critical perspectives. For example students worked in small groups to design table-sized dialogue sheets as prompts for debates around issues they had identified, such as the attainment of Black males at GCSE; increasing rates of exclusions in inner city schools; poverty and early years education; or the education of refugee/traveller children. These sessions were often noisy and included robust disagreements, which my colleagues had to handle with sensitivity. Some students had to confront deeply held views and learn to see things from different perspectives.

Student engagement in learning outcomes

There had been no student engagement in learning outcomes, and my change rested upon students really understanding and grappling with them. Exercises in the first two weeks involved activities such as translating the learning outcomes into different words so that any students choosing the module next year would understand them better. We spent time discussing what phrases such as 'critical engagement' meant. More importantly, seminars debated what students had to provide to show they had met the learning outcomes at different levels. For example, one exercise asked students to consider what evidence might look like that was graded at 2:1 compared to a 2:2. Another exercise involved students marking a short piece of writing and a short film using the assessment criteria and comparing marks.

Curriculum design

Curriculum design had been static. The module had been validated with a lecture schedule and that was the curriculum each year. In my design, while key concepts underpinned the module the curriculum was co-created with the students in the first two weeks and modified as the weeks progressed. Students discussed the issues they wanted to explore or those that had an effect on them and then decided which would feature in the coming weeks. Sometimes an issue would spark so much debate that it might spill over two weeks and the academic team had to be flexible enough to accept this. The balance shifted from teacher control to co-creation with students.

Challenges

I faced three main challenges. First, I had to convince the colleagues running the other seminar sessions that a truly student-centred approach was preferable to a traditional teacher-led approach. Many colleagues were sceptical about students' ability both to offer experiences and stories and allow them to be scrutinized academically. They were also sceptical about an inclusive assessment strategy that allowed students to decide how best to evidence that learning outcomes had been met. Secondly, I had to re write the module outline, learning outcomes and assessment strategy with my colleagues to reflect the more open approach. It was a challenge to convince some on the team that we could retain enough content to meet the course outcomes and the spirit of the originally validated course. I also had to convince them to 'let go' of their control of the content and allow students to choose the issues and illustrate those issues themselves. A key threshold concept was understanding that just because students had been told something, it did not mean they had learnt it or engaged with it in a meaningful way. In place of telling students through lecturer-led seminar discussions, the new approach invited students to share stories, experiences, and observations on the topic of the lecture. Some students found video clips on the topic or created dialogue sheets or even poems to further explore the issue. In one group, a student invited her brother, who had been excluded from school as a young man, in to share his perspectives on the issue. Such activities resulted in richer and more student-centred debates.

In facilitating discussion, a key task of academic colleagues was to consider prompt questions such as: 'How would X's experiences be interpreted from a feminist perspective?'

Meeting regularly the teaching team was also able to share examples of what had worked in seminars and arrange observations so less confident colleagues could see what others were doing.

Finally once the module began, the challenge was to adopt pedagogic practices to encourage students to:

- > really engage with the learning outcomes;
- > identify and share experiences or issues they had faced;
- > use reflection on and analysis of those experiences as evidence of meeting the learning outcomes. This involved helping students see things from different perspectives and apply the theories they had been introduced to.

The everyday consequences of the changes to practice that ensue from the catalyst

Students understand that this module requires them to be present in ways that are different from many others. Attendance is good and often discussions spill over into the student café afterwards. Friendships seem to develop easily once students share life stories. Interestingly, those students who often report feeling marginalized or outsiders in higher education are often those with the stories worth telling in this module. These students grow in confidence and classroom dynamics change. Academic colleagues report feeling closer to the students and understanding them more deeply.

The content of this module has become richer. Over four years we have addressed issues that academic staff may not have included, such as education and the traveler community, and the education of cared-for children. We have also explored a wider range of perspectives such as the Black Nationalist perspective on

the attainment of Black males in schools. We have a varied bank of materials over three years of running the module which can be shared with future cohorts. Lectures require the skill of displaying the application of theory or the debates around an issue rather than a straightforward delivery of content. Students often know more about the actual issues than the 'expert academics' displacing the traditional power dynamics. This can be exciting but also challenging.

Students probe academic staff on the meaning of words used in learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Students regularly check whether their choice of assessment method will meet the criteria and space has been carved out of seminars to provide this.

Occasionally a student might disclose an issue that requires some support – usually following a seminar in a one-to-one tutorial. Colleagues have to be alert to this and have to be able to signpost the student to the appropriate professional.

The impact of the changes to practice and how has the impact been developed further or future proofed?

A number of other modules across the University have taken aspects of this design on board. Some have taken on the work on learning outcomes to ensure students understand them. Others have also decided to offer students the choice of assessment methods and university regulations have been changed to reflect this and offer equivalency guidelines. A small number have replicated the model of co-creation of the curriculum where this is appropriate. These include an Entrepreneurship module in the Business School.

There are ten departments at Roehampton and following an undergraduate student- led conference in Psychology, most departments now have a student-led conference in the summer term based on topics and presentations identified by students and run entirely by students.

The impact of this particular module has been future proofed in as much as the resources now exist to prompt future student cohorts to share their stories, and the module has been revalidated to highlight the aims of co-creation and flexible assessment. However, it relies on an academic module leader who is committed to this approach and a skilled team of seminar facilitators.

How the practice has been informed by and has intersected with literature on learning and teaching and reflections on my teaching philosophy

My practice has been informed by a range of research that seeks to explore how we teach in universities and how we might teach more effectively, especially in an inner city context with a diverse range of students. I am interested in the practice of teaching in a way that is truly inclusive and the practice of active, engaged learning. This has also led me to seek out theory that explains the role of higher education and why it is so resistant to changes that make it more inclusive.

I have found a tendency in using the term 'non-traditional' to conflate the experiences of a range of students including those who are mature, female or minority ethnic. In my practice I aim to provide space for the intersection of age, gender, 'race', ethnicity and class and recognize that students have a multiplicity of identities.

Research (Gibbs 1981; Ramsden 1992; Laurillard 1993) suggests that in higher education we are mainly communicating facts and concepts in the disciplines, rather than helping students to develop higher-order skills. Lecturers are aware that learning requires active student involvement and engagement, but studies (Deslauriers et al. 2011) reveal that students are still subjected to non-interactive lectures, many of which they fail to attend and much of the information from which they fail to retain or apply.

Barnett argues that one of the aims of 'higher' learning is the development of a more questioning, critical engagement with the world (Barnett 1997). Most lecturers aspire to challenge and develop their students' cognitive abilities and help them to progress towards this different kind of engagement, perhaps through confronting concepts of troublesome knowledge (Meyer and Land 2003) or providing opportunities for transformative learning. Research by Hockings et al. (2008) illustrates that the development of 'inclusive classrooms' and pedagogies must be sensitive to complexities in the student experience, while drawing on a range of student-centred practices. The practice I describe here attempts to provide examples of what such student-centred activity might look like.

My approach means that I have become deeply interested in exclusionary pedagogic practices and the historical and ideological reasons for their existence, even within universities committed to serving a diverse student population. Reay, David and Ball (2001) consider Bourdieu's concept of habitus when they discuss students' relationships with their university. Habitus is a complex internalized core of an organization or social institution from which the everyday experiences associated with it emanate. It is the source of the day-to-day practices and, as Reay et al. (2001) comment:

Habitus produces action, but because it confines possibilities to those feasible for the social groups the individual belongs to. Much of the time those actions tend to be reproductive rather than transformative. (Reay et al. 2001, p. 1)

Bourdieu (cited in Swartz 1997) contends that one of the main functions of education is to socialize students into a particular social-cultural tradition and by doing this it reinforces, but does not distribute, social capital. This leads to what Schwartz (1997) terms "regimented intellectual habitus" (p. 106) focused on transmission and assessment and strategies to pass a course rather than an interest in learning.

Despite the marked increase in students from working-class and ethnically diverse backgrounds attending university in the last decade, and popular and media conceptions of the university as a 'feminised' arena, academic culture continues to predominantly reflect the dominant discourse of the student learner as white, middle-class and male (Leathwood and Read 2009). While financial constraints have been found to have a major impact both on university entry and on the successful completion of degree courses among working-class students of diverse ethnic backgrounds, social and cultural factors also have a bearing (Archer and Hutchings 2000). As Spurling (1990), Tett (2000) and others have pointed out; students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds are also disadvantaged by an institutional culture that places them as 'other'. In my practice, therefore, I have attempted to counter this culture by inviting students to share their experiences and see that such experiences can be an advantage in studying education.

The concept of alienation has been very important in my understanding of the passive/surface learning which has been regularly debated in higher education. For Mann (2001) pressure and the relationship of power between academics and students do not allow for formless experience, and thus creativity and the development of an autonomous sense of self. The alternative for the student is the development of a 'false self', developed as a means of surviving the loss or lack of a good enough relationship and a good enough learning space. This idea of the false self can easily be recognised in the features identified as characteristic of a 'surface' or 'achieving' orientation to learning. Beckett and Hagar take this further suggesting that the "historically-hallowed elitism" (2002, p. 4) of universities leaves the formal academic sphere depleted of its learning capacity.

It is interesting for me to note a parallel debate in the contemporary art movement (Kester 2005) with a number of artists avoiding the tradition of object making for an audience. Kester points to a number of artists choosing instead to use contemporary artistic practices to promote inclusive, active, evolving conversations, free from fixed identities or institutional viewpoints. He further argues that the creative orchestration of encounters has the potential to produce new knowledge and understanding beyond the boundaries of galleries or museums.

Recently Carey (2013), Neary (2013) and others have examined the notion of students as co-producers of knowledge in the age of the so-called consumer student. Carey discusses the ways in which students might be involved in curriculum design. Neary (2011) explains in an article in the Guardian that the slogan 'Student as producer' stems from a more radical aim – derived from an article written by the Marxist intellectual Walter Benjamin in Germany in the 1930s. Benjamin's political point was that in times of social crisis, passive consumers of culture and knowledge should transform themselves into the subjects rather than simply the objects of history and to recognise themselves in a social world of their own design. According to Neary:

Student as Producer is grounding this 'ideal of the university' in the radicalized student-worker uprisings of 1968 and the ways in which this student protest has re-emerged at the beginning of the 21st century against the privatisation of university life, now packaged as the 'student experience' where the most predominant imperative is employability (HEFCE 2010) (Neary, 2012, p.2)

Practical advice and tips for others adopting or adapting this approach, for adapting the scale, or applying it to another aspect of practice in this discipline or others

This approach can be adapted to other disciplines where students are required to apply ideas and concepts to aspects of real life. At Roehampton it is offered on a module taken by a large student cohort.

Tip 1: Do not start from what you will tell the students, start planning the module by considering whether the students own experiences can provide content or at least lenses through which to investigate the content.

Tip 2: Devote the first two weeks to student-centred classroom activities which help students grapple with the learning outcomes and consider how they might evidence they have met them. These sessions can also investigate assessment criteria and what work might look like at different levels. Show students previous work.

Tip 3: Use the first two weeks also to welcome students' experiences and stories. Many will consider these inappropriate for university or may be shy and so this can be hard. Working in small groups can help, prompted by dialogue sheets, for example, which can kick off conversations. Encourage traditionally under-represented groups in particular with prompt questions and quotes which speak to particular experiences of exclusion. If a large number of student issues arise then the seminar group can be asked to decide which to focus on in following weeks.

Tip 4: By week three the curriculum can be shaped by the experiences and issues shared and lectures can be planned. Each lecture should include a student example/story which can then be further explored through research and policy analysis. Student examples/stories can form the basis of seminar discussions.

Tip 5: Make sure students do not get carried away making a film for example and they focus on assessment criteria.

Tip 6: Show them marked work and get them to judge it.

Tip 7: Encourage students to consider their assessment method to gain from the most from the module and challenge themselves. Be careful about equivalences, for example, a presentation versus an essay.

Tip 8: Be aware that some students do not want to share and some share too much. Teaching skills need to be fairly sophisticated and some colleagues may be uncomfortable in letting go of control.

Conclusion

This module clearly lends itself to this kind of approach but I believe that many more modules could be adapted to systematically invite and subsequently explore student experiences. I would go as far as suggesting that one of the roles of higher education should be to do this. Student engagement is a fashionable buzz word but often fails to move beyond governance and feedback. What is described here is an attempt to co-create the curriculum, which gives confidence and cultural capital to those students who often feel marginalized in our universities.

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