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Non-Formal Global Learning in Higher Education

Student-led Learning Outcomes

Background



- Universities claim to want to create global citizens.
- What do we mean by this?
 - Is it about the global economy?
 - Is it about solidarity?
- How can Universities fulfil this role?
 - Through various degree courses?
 - In extra-curricular spaces such as student societies?
- How do students interpret this development?

Living-learning communities

- Co-curricular or non-formal education
- Common in US context
- Difficult without free/core credits
- US research suggests that they offer lots of benefits for learning



The Global Community

- ▶ Living-learning community with a focus on international development and human rights.
- ▶ Opening a space for interdisciplinary collaboration and learning.
- ▶ Students defined how they wanted the community to develop.
- ▶ There were no leaders/chairs/presidents.
- ▶ Limited input from staff
 - ▶ Networking Event
 - ▶ Facilitated meetings



The Research



- In-depth case study of the first year of the programme.
- Observations and interviews with participants.
- Capability Approach framework.
- Interest in the extent to which students achieved outcomes of value to them.



Research questions

- To what the extent can engagement in non-formal learning communities in higher education facilitate learning students' value?
 - What do students value from their participation in non-formal learning in terms of their own personal development at University?
 - Did their participation in the Global Community contribute to their agency to act on issues important to them?
 - How can Universities facilitate participatory, student-led, non-formal learning?

Observations and activities

- Cine Forum
- Operation Empty Cupboards
- Identities Workshop
- Refugee week
 - Art and music
 - creativity and positivity
 - Clothes swap
 - Sleep out
 - Quiz
 - Debate



Interviews: Central features



- The original focus and the role that they envisaged the GC playing.
- Importance of defining and shaping the process and the outcomes of the GC.
- The communities created, within and beyond the University, through the GC.
- The non-hierarchical nature of the GC and not having a predetermined leader.



Expected outcomes

- Promoting and developing social justice attitudes
- Learning new things
- Developing skills
- Enabling friendships
- Raising awareness about global issues
- Taking responsibility

➤ *“I guess we learned stuff as well, especially when we’re preparing each week because we all had to get information to be able to reply to questions, so for us it was also interesting because we had to do proper work on it.” (Sara)*

Unanticipated outcomes

- Seeing different perspectives
- Gaining confidence
- Developing imagination
- Sharing and respecting others' views
- Developing networks
- Negotiating horizontal relationships

➤ *When it just became a group of people who knew each other just sitting around talking, then it got a lot better, and then it became more interesting and the community aspect of it came out a bit... just meeting new people from different places and different perspectives, which I think was the unexpected side of it, really... everyone's interested to get to know each other and, because, you know, you have a similar interest, there's not that fear of putting it upfront. (Daniel)*

➤ *"I definitely understand a lot more issues...it was very interesting to sort of think about these issues, to get to know about these issues and then to think about them and what we could do with regards to them." (Diana)*

➤ *"I think it's good that I'm more aware of the opportunities that there are in [the city] with these organisations and I think it's nice to meet people who care about the same kind of things." (Leonor)*

Unanticipated Outcomes

- ▶ *It's about not achieving the outcomes that you necessarily expected. (Daniel)*

- ▶ Non-hierarchical relationships:

- ▶ *I had to compromise. It is fine and I am really happy with what we did but I think we all have to meet halfway, but not all of us did that so...you know, you learn, so I learnt at least self-control and compromise and stuff but seriously I see it in a positive way... I am proud that I managed to do that and that taught me that so I did not have to shout randomly to get things done and be a leader. (Henrietta)*
- ▶ *Good experience with the difficulty of trying to do stuff around human rights and development, which is obviously a really difficult topic to ever say we are an educated group talking to another group about....because we don't have a rule, this is where we stand on this, often you just get debate from it...so good understanding of how that is going to be a challenge if I go into this sort of line of work where...there are ethical stances on it. (Daniel)*



Values and agency

- The involvement in the community provided students with opportunities to learning and develop skills and led to a number of outcomes that they valued.
- This included outcomes that facilitated their agency to act on the issues or importance to them.
- Both learning and agency were highlighted in the outcomes that emerged from the students discussions of what they valued.
- Of course there were also challenges and some of the valued aspects of the community were seen as difficult and often creating tension.
 - The non-hierarchical nature of the community was an example of this.



Global Learning in Higher Education

- ▶ The student-led aspect of the community was essential and the endeavour to keep the community non-hierarchical and facilitate discussions to negotiate consensus were a challenging but important part of the learning.
- ▶ Some input from the university helped to stimulate involvement and commitment, especially at the beginning.
 - ▶ The Networking event
 - ▶ Facilitation from postgraduate student participants
- ▶ Providing spaces, facilities and recognition were important institutional contributions.



Conclusions

- ▶ We argue that these non-formal learning communities in higher education can facilitate opportunities for students to learn and engage with issues they value.
- ▶ Defining their own processes and creating a non-hierarchical community, students must negotiate different perspectives, and learn to take responsibility for their learning.
- ▶ This enables them to imagine possibilities, gain confidence, and trust and respect each other.
- ▶ The community in which they do this provides a space for them to interpret what outcomes are important, and how they achieve them, including how to manage difference and uncertainty.
- ▶ There is a scarcity of educational spaces in which the learning outcomes are not predetermined that make this an interesting and important case study to explore.



Thank you!

➤ Questions?



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