Hearing Voices? Involving students in curriculum design and development

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Thinking points

• Whose curriculum is it? - who really knows what the “best” should be?
• Are students and staff equal partners in the learning and teaching process?
• What are the real (or imagined) barriers?
• How can we enable others to hear the student voices?
• Is it worth it???????????????????
What are our concerns/questions/issues?
My contexts

• Hearing the Student Voice-two ESCalate funded projects
• BCU Redesign of Learning Experience (RoLEx)
• Student Academic Partners projects (SAP)
Hearing the student voice: using students to enhance professional development and inform academic practice in higher education

www.napier.ac.uk/studentvoices

Hearing the student voice 2: involving students in curriculum design and development

http://www2.napier.ac.uk/studentvoices/curriculum/index.htm

The projects involved Napier University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Birmingham City University, and University of Westminster and were funded by ESCalate.
Both projects involved the team in developing in-depth case studies of innovative practice which were shared with the sector.
Starting points

How can we provide meaningful opportunities for:

• students to voice their experiences of learning and teaching?

• staff to hear, to see the implications for academic practice and to respond?

• students to be meaningfully involved in shaping the curriculum?

• equipping staff to involve students in this design by encouraging cross-fertilisation of ideas through inter-institutional networking.
Aims

Investigate and promote the use of the student voice in informing academic practice and curriculum design by:

- developing and evaluating case studies capturing and harnessing student voices
- investigating student issues
- sharing outcomes
- building a community of practice
What is the student voice?

✓ authentic student words captured during meaningful opportunities enabling reflection and contribution

✗ collations of student feedback collected through surveys and questionnaires
Why?

We must engage with students in a richer, more deliberate way at the course level that acknowledges their right ... to participate in the development and design of their own curriculum.
(James Alexander, NUS President, Scotland, 2007)

Enabling students to contribute proactively can enhance the curriculum and motivate students ‘who gain a sense of ownership in their own educational journey’ (Davie and Galloway, 1996).

If the quality of teaching and learning is to be addressed in any real sense in our universities, the need to look at teaching and learning from the students’ perspective must be recognised.


Examining students’ own words can reveal the meaning of learning experiences.

O’Neill et al (2005)
Informed by:
- Senior Learning and Teaching Fellows
- Learning Technology Champions
- Academic Registry
- ‘Identified’ innovators

Supported by:
- Course Teams
- PSRBs
- Employers
- External Examiners
- Students

3 employability & assessment
4 individualised learning???
Student Academic Partners (SAP)

- Joint initiative with the Students Union
- The SAP scheme aims to integrate students into faculty-based teams responsible for driving forward developments in the University’s teaching and learning agenda. The project therefore provides students and staff with the opportunity to work together to strengthen the learning experience at a grassroots level.

The Scheme offers an opportunity for paid employment (for up to 125 hours of work) to enable students to work in equal partnership with faculty staff to strengthen the learning and teaching development of the University. SAP invites students and staff to identify educational development projects in which a student will play an active role. This provides students with the opportunity to guide the development of projects in an academic employment setting in a paid post at the University.

- http://www.birminghamcitysu.com/saps/
Themes and Impact

Enabling dialogue - real conversations with real students need to create ongoing dialogue rather than “one-off” interventions.

Active involvement - inviting students to “drive” their resources and contribute their ideas = more engagement.

“I was happy that my views were being considered and that I could use my learning style to maximum advantage” (student Birmingham City University)
• **Students as co-creators-**

• “It pushed the module team into thinking ‘out of the box’ in assessment terms. Yes there were risks but, overall, this has taken a step in a good direction which can inform teaching across the whole course” (Colleague Leeds Metropolitan)

• “This was an excellent way of meeting the different needs of different cohorts, with the possibility of immediate feedback on their comments” (Colleague Westminster Art and Design)

• “We were able to direct lessons and bring our own experiences to class, matching it to relevant theories...because we planned the lessons we knew what was coming and looked forward to it. (Student Birmingham City University)
Impact on students

See direct benefit of their contribution

Perceive views valued by institution

Appreciate opportunity to contribute insights

engagement with course
Issues

• Staff involvement
• Student representation
• Student recruitment

• Possible Solutions
• Payment/rewards for students
• Use existing student representatives
• Student ambassadors
• Embed within the curriculum

• Clarify to the students (and staff) what they will gain tangibly from their involvement
Is it worth it????????

“Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to excel.”
References


• O’Neill, B.J.& Wyness, A. (2005) Student voices on an interprofessional course *Medical Education* 34