Title: Academics and students sharing views on pedagogy: issues in participatory research for academic professional development

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Consider some practical issues in conducting participatory research with academic staff and students in HE
- Consider some conceptual issues in conducting participatory research with academic staff and students in HE
- Understand how the findings have been used with staff and students
- Describe some of the key findings of one research project which used this methodology to help staff and students gain a richer picture of the student journey

Session Outline

Recent years have seen increasing interest in ways in which we might engage students in teaching enhancement and their role as co-researchers, co-inquirers and co-creators of knowledge (Fuller et al.,2009; Yorke and Longden 2008; Healy et al.,2010). Writers such as Mann (2001) however warn us that power differentials mean that students can be estranged from the language culture and practices of their HE context and thus find themselves positioned as subject/object and thus alienated from a pre-exiting discoursal world. This session will discuss the participatory (Lather, 1991) methodological approach taken in the Gender and Pedagogies NTFS project at Roehampton University. The first year of this two year project has involved us in gathering 64 students' perspectives on their learning experiences and then sharing these with those who teach them. In turn we have then collected the views of academic staff and shared these with their students. By the time we present this paper, students will have made short film clips and will have organised events for staff and students together at Roehampton and at Kings College London to further discuss the data and its implications. The approach has proved to be a powerful vehicle for encouraging rich discussion and reflection on pedagogic practice. Our interim findings suggest that, while recounting inspirational educative moments, students are at times bored and uninspired by approaches they perceive as monotonous, whereas the academic staff are often disappointed by the responses of the students and their lack of engagement and motivation. This has been interrogated in discipline-specific staff focus groups, using quotations from the students to illustrate their perception of the teaching to which they are exposed in their studies. In parallel students have explored the views of academic staff. This paper will share our experiences of

this methodological approach and some interim findings and will argue that there is a disjuncture between some dominant pedagogic practices and academic discourses in higher education and how they are experienced by students in their journey through their undergraduate programmes. We will also critically explore the benefits of using this methodological approach at key points in the student journey and some of the issues which we have had to confront.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

25 Minutes – presentation of discussion paper
20 Minutes – discussion of questions such as:
- How do we avoid allegations of 'data mining' when using such approaches?
- To what extent do such approaches encourage students to think that universities are pandering to them as consumers?
- How much should we expect students to be willing to or be able to engage in debate about pedagogic practices?
- How might we embed such opportunities to discuss pedagogic practices throughout a student journey?
- What are the ethical issues in employing participative research methods?

References

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