

Students as co-researchers

Sally Palmer

1. Introduction

We are very good at 'listening to the student voice' and to enhance this beyond the usual module/year/placement evaluations and course boards, we have started to engage students in researching aspects of the course with a view to enhancing learning and teaching and the student experience.

2. Practice/innovation detail

We have been taking final year students to Sweden since 2006. At a certain point, we needed to review the effectiveness and efficiency of continuing to offer this educational visit. To undertake this review, we managed to secure funding from the Pedagogic Research and Scholarship Institute (PRSI) to research into the impact of the educational visit on students and their subsequent practice. The research provided rich data in three areas: the transformational effectiveness of the visit, encouraging students to re-evaluate their existing practice and belief systems; the physicality of going to Sweden, which was critical to this transformative change; and risk-taking practice linked to trusting relationships, which is central for children's healthy growth and development. The research was a collaborative process with students working as co-researchers in the process. Two journal articles have been published, and a further article is in progress.

The research provided rich data in three areas

REF funding enabled this initial project to be extended to explore opportunities for peer teaching and peer mentoring, with students/practitioners in the UK and Sweden engaging in learning and teaching through social media. The initial stages involved a visit to Stockholm University where ECS students and staff met to share experiences and knowledge. The findings from this project are currently being reviewed with students working as co-researchers with staff.

Further funding was secured through the Sustainability Team to explore the concepts and practice of sustainability in Early Years education.

The results have impacted on ECS course design and content

Two students joined the Course Leader as co-researchers to explore current understanding, attitudes, ideas and practice. The results have impacted upon ECS course design and content, to embed these issues more across all levels. Case studies collected from a range of students have the potential to form a book.

At present, Level 4 and 5 students are acting as co-researchers with the Course Leader on how students use Facebook during their course. In addition, Level 4 students are engaged in a project which involves them designing their own assessment criteria. Also, Level 5 students are researching areas of our action plan for 2014-2015, particularly issues related to National Student Survey (NSS) outcomes on assessment and intellectual challenge, and issues raised through Review of Academic Professional Practice (RAPP) meetings, such as student engagement in self-assessment and student attendance.

3. Evaluation

The engagement of students as co-researchers has motivated staff to become more engaged in the research process as there are direct results, and improvements to learning and teaching are more tangible.

The Early Years team won first prize at an international conference for their research on peer teaching and mentoring across countries.

4. Conclusions

We will continue to engage students as co-researchers as this encourages student engagement and participation, and satisfaction. It is time-consuming and currently does not sit within modules, so it involves extra commitment from both staff and students.

5. Further information

Module/Course/Department	Early Childhood Studies
Subject Area	
Level	4 and 5 and 6
Number of students	120 approx
Academic Year (if appropriate)	
Date of case study	26 January 2015
Keywords	Student research