

Title

Reflections on practice-led, student-centred learning for a final year UG module – a critical view on the social construct of in-module 'structure'.

Rationale

This paper draws on feedback data on a Business Management Level 3 undergraduate module (Organisation Development) at a new university in order to explore current social constructs within this student cohort of 'practice-led, student-centred learning'. This unique module has been developed specifically to encompass students undertaking an 8 week group consultancy project with local organisations. Notions of the importance of practice-led and experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) as well as student-centred teaching (Rogers et al, 2013) links to active learning, employability and scholarly activity (Biggs and Tang, 2011) seem to be challenged by students construct of in-module 'structure'. In relation to this we explore UG Business Management student's interaction with traditional lectures and subsequent student-centred workshops. This engagement with different organisation structures is an area central to enabling future graduates to realise their potential in today's complex organisations and changing environment.

Aims

This paper aims to explore student's perceptions of practice-led, student-centred learning, and through our own reflective practice as module leaders, to extend understanding of delivering scholarly learning through practice-led learning

Design

Mid-module feedback forms were handed out to all attending students at the start of their weekly workshop towards the end of semester 1. The feedback forms included four categories: what I enjoy/ think works well; what I'm not sure about/ don't understand; some suggestions for change; potential implications of above suggestions for change. This feedback was gathered in response to: developing a unique UG practice led-module; with a view to further modelling student-centred learning; and providing multiple feedback points for students during the module.

How it went

Although workshop attendance was high only 30 out of 61 students returned the feedback form. This response rate of 49% indicates that the data gathered might not represent the entire cohort.

Template analysis was used to interrogate the data and themes were created for each of the four sections on the feedback form. Additional analysis of strong themes was conducted to further our understanding.

Evaluation

The results from the feedback exercise were striking and paradoxical. There had been expectation to find uncertainty about the student centred approach and apprehension to undertaking a 'real life' consultancy group project.

However, evaluation suggest that students are positively enthusiastic about practice-led learning and working with 'real' organisations so as to undertake a group consultancy project, with several feedback forms noting that they are 'enjoying' group work.

Unsurprisingly feedback suggests that students are less enthusiastic about student-centred learning, wanting more 'answers' and greater pre-determined content driven structure, and less discursive scholarly insight designed to meet their individual and group needs.

Paradoxically, where the desired structure exists (traditional weekly lecture) attendance is low (30%) yet where the content delivery is more student centred (weekly workshops) attendance is consistently high (80%+)

The social construct formed by these final year Business Management undergraduate students on practice-led, student-centred learning confirms some existing literature on the subject but also challenges the fundamental view on the nature of practice-led, student-centred learning as providing a nexus between employability and scholarly activity, as students were predominantly concerned with the formal written structure of the workshops rather than the discursive scholarly insight. In this discussion we further consider students constructs of 'real' learning as being gained through structured context rather than through discursive exploration and the impact this may have on the student's ability to engage in complex organisation structures as graduates.

Dissemination

Conference - ABS

Journal Paper – Studies in Higher Education

Practice – our own reflective practice

Key references

Biggs, J. and Tang, C. (2011) Teaching for quality and learning at university (4th ed). Maidenhead: Open University Press McGraw Hill

Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (Vol. 1). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Rogers, C., Lyon, H. and Tausch, R (2013) *On Becoming an Effective Teacher - Person-centered Teaching, Psychology, Philosophy, and Dialogues with Carl R. Rogers and Harold Lyon*. London: Routledge: