

PARTNERSHIPS AND PRACTICES IN GLOBAL HEALTH: RESEARCHING AN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROJECT WITH FINAL YEAR STUDENTS (0354)

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Background to research

Students entering higher education are promised an international education. To make this a reality for occupational therapy students, who spend considerable periods of time in local health and care organisations learning through practice, an existing research relationship with Lund University was explored for its educational potential. Now entering its fourth year, the collaborative model is based on short intensive visits for all final year students studying occupational therapy at Lund and Southampton universities. Funding has been variously sourced internally and externally, and sustainability remains a goal, making research timely and important. Competitive tendering was successful through the Higher Education Academy (HEA) 'Students as partners' (Healey et al, 2014) strand of work, enabling a year-long investigation to take place.

Literature

The development of a more globally orientated workforce has long been a goal of the World Health Organisation (WHO) (Global Health Workforce Alliance, 2012). Professionals with a pluralistic worldview and intercultural skill and competence are key to developing a global health workforce. Yet ways of incorporating this goal into nationally commissioned, regionally organised higher education programmes remains elusive, as classroom strategies alone have been found to be problematic (Scudamore, 2013). Tourism Concern (2014) criticises the 'voluntourism' so popular with expensive agencies providing 'gap year' and Summer break schemes, considering such schemes to do more harm than good. Even well organised exchange schemes seemed to affect only marginally a sense of intercultural capability among students in Root and Ngampornchai's (2012) study. Sustainable and effective international education needs to be researched if we are to better understand how to offer a more inclusive experience, that does not depend solely on travel and exchange, if collaborative ventures such as the Lund-Southampton programme are to be rigorously evaluated and understood.

Methodology

The research question asked whether and how the international partnership influenced students' knowledge, understanding and sense of identity as global healthcare citizens, and whether they considered intercultural capabilities to be developed through their professional education.

In total, contributions from 26 students were analysed. Peers employed as co-researchers carried out in-depth interviews with fourteen student-participants and another twelve completed an anonymised online survey developed from the interview schedule. Involvement by student co-researchers in all aspects of

methodology characterised the research team's work, including study design, methods, interview schedule development, all stages of ethical approval gained from the Faculty of Health Sciences, November 2014, and finally authorship (and dissemination) of the commissioned report.

Discussion of findings

Four themes were developed that spoke to: the development of meaningful relationships between students; the development of a professional identity as part of a global community; expectations, trepidation and reflections on achievements; and beginning to speculate on how others experienced the world. Each theme served to complicate and enrich notions of students working in multiple partnerships and as members of communities, and to challenge concepts of students as self-interested agents or consumers. The pedagogic approaches that served to promote generosity and mutuality emerged in participants' detailed descriptions and accounts. Findings introduced the potential of working on shared concerns, as a means to transcend local and national healthcare systems and to discover new allegiances and alternative futures.

Conclusions

Six pedagogic devices with established roots in education theory and research are compared with findings, each being in some way or other pivotal to the establishment and sustenance of partnership working. Each is presented and discussed in terms of their broader application, and an exercise we call 'circles of partnership' is suggested as part of developing a holistic approach to inter/national collaborative ventures.

1. Working on 'real' projects and shared concerns

Students described the short intensive visits as remarkable in their effectiveness in forging productive project work groups, able to carry out research, overcome language differences and present to peers after only five days. In working hard both practically and intellectually, learning by doing, and developing more reflexive approaches, they reflected the theoretical work of Beckett (2009), Billett (2008).

2. Informal learning

The importance to participants of time spent simply 'being', whether together in mixed project groups, or as friendship groups, or travelling and socialising, the importance to them of informal time cannot be over estimated. We conclude that, as Usher (2010) and others have asserted, the potential of informal learning, *not* being assessed or overviewed, is undervalued in education more generally.

3. High expectations, high support

The stimulation of learning independently, with sometimes ambiguous or seemingly abstract briefs, was deeply rewarding. 'High level' support meant final year students were required to immerse in topics, to be able to call upon 'experts' in informed ways. Balancing high expectations with high support – of the kind *students* find supportive – is developed from Kift et al's (2010) research.

4. Communities of practice and circles of partnership

Participants spoke of 'feeling' part of a community beyond education and practice contacts. Many contributed, through forms of reportage, seeing their work circulated widely. The 'joint enterprise' of Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice emerged in descriptions of relationships forged around common purposes, and led us to develop a 'circles of partnership' exercise to further involve students in international collaborations.

5. Embedding principles of care, hospitality and reciprocity in partnerships

Mann's (2008) work provided a starting point for understanding the many kinds of inclusivity – and exclusivity – described by participants, and engendered by travel, visits, new relationships, and new 'selves'. Ways to involve students who are unable or choose not to take part, and the wider duties of institutions and technologists, are discussed.

6. Students as producers of high quality healthcare

Final year students showed themselves to be fully aware of their contribution to practice, to education and to a global healthcare community. Their new insights enabled the decisions made by societies and governments around health and social care organisation to be critiqued and viewed as political rather than pragmatic in nature. We suggest Neary's (2013) concept of student as producer opens the door to much more explicit constructions of students as producers and as partners: with people using services, with practitioners and with their academic colleagues.

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