

1. Project Title

Embedding Undergraduates in the Research-Teaching Nexus: The Case of Money Sex Power in Global Context

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2. Keywords

Undergraduates, teaching, research (Sociology)

3. Summary

The overall aim of this research project is to develop a curriculum which is not only research led and student centred but is co-managed and co-taught by students. Principally, students will research and deliver teaching sessions on the third year undergraduate module in sociology *Money Sex and Power in Global Context* and, as part of the participatory action research model being used, to form a Student Steering Committee that will contribute to the management and evaluation of the project.

The research is being developed through three stages.

- The first stage (Spring, Summer 2005-6) forms pilot research to ascertain the skill sets and support structures that are required for students to develop competencies in the research and delivery of teaching sessions.
- The second stage (2006-7) includes training in learning and teaching methodologies and will focus on student experiences of teaching preparation, lecturing and seminar facilitation.
- Whilst each stage contains evaluative elements, the third stage (Autumn 2007) forms a final evaluation. This includes an assessment of the contribution of the project to the development of transferable skills. Evaluation will also be concerned with how, and in what ways, student engagement in the project has enhanced (or otherwise) their substantive knowledge of the module's intellectual concerns. More generally, and at the level of the affect, evaluation is concerned to explore how teaching and learning innovations of this kind can create a more active and engaged student response to the curriculum.

4. Activities

Stage One Work Completed to Date (as reported June 2006)

The first, pilot, stage was completed over the spring and summer terms 2005-6. This included students preparing and delivering 3 lectures and seminars. An evaluation in the form of a questionnaire and focus group was undertaken as well as an analysis of exam results. Out of 30 students, 5 achieved a first class examination mark and all other students (bar one) achieved a 2.1. The questionnaire and focus group evaluation generally indicated a positive response from students with some caveats (pressure of work that this kind of initiative produced; group process concerns; timing issues; tutor and technical support). The findings also pointed to a lack of pedagogical understanding apart from technical skills such as presentation, hand out preparation and so forth.

Stage Two Work Completed to Date

a. Thematic Organisation of the Curriculum

- On the basis of last year's pilot, the entire curriculum was redesigned into four thematic sections.
- These thematic sections lead into the student led lectures and seminars. In consequence, there are four of these this year.
- Using a thematic approach to the curriculum has also enabled us to develop questions for the students to work on that cross each week of the theme (rather than a question per week). This, we believe, allows for deeper learning and provides a richer terrain for student led research.
- Theme One was delivered by students in the Autumn term.

b. Student Steering Committee

- 9 students (out of 22) volunteered to be members of the Student Steering Committee. This has met once this term though finding a time when all could attend was extremely difficult!

c. Student Organisation of Presentations

There are two seminar groups on this module. For delivery of the two student led lecture/seminar sessions so far completed, the students decided that each seminar group would alternate between lecture/seminar responsibilities. In a recent discussion with students (24/01/07) they are now suggesting that they might move to using the whole session for a seminar rather than a lecture/seminar. More discussion is to occur on this.

d. Money Sex and Power Forum

A Warwick Forum was set up to assist with communication across and within the groups.

How is it Going So Far

To date, I would say that it is proving to be very exciting. The standard of lecture and seminar work in both Theme One and Theme Two was exceptionally high. The students demonstrated a high level of intellectual and theoretical understanding and produced presentations that were engaging and thought provoking.

Issues Arising

The amount of work we are asking of the students is exceptional and they are, rightly, concerned that there will be a pay-off in terms of links to assessment. In the short term, this has led to ensuring that the assessment questions draw upon the thematic questions. This has produced fewer questions than previously (eight rather than 18) and has also had knock on effects for the form of the unseen examination as this will now be organized into the four themes delineated (to avoid repetition of assessed work). On the positive side, this will ensure that students will need to cover much more of the curriculum than previously (where questions were set for each week of the module) and, again, all questions will combine themes from two or more weeks. In the longer term, I believe we will need to look at the assessment pattern more generally for this module with a view to including the presentations as part of the final assessment (something the students have suggested) and/or having a longer assessed essay.

The module has historically been organized in a lecture plus seminar format. The timing issues are proving to be problematic for the student led weeks as students have other commitments and cannot therefore be available for the whole three hour slot (as the students would prefer when organizing their sessions). The students have elected to change the time of their 'presentation' weeks to ensure that all can be available. However, from next year this module will need to be organized in a three hour slot rather than the common one hour slots.

There are concerns about non-attendance of some students as this impacts upon group motivation and may prove to put such students in a difficult position in terms of the revised assessment procedures. This is also causing concern with students who are showing commitment whereas others are not.

Whilst the original proposal indicated that we would provide pedagogical training in the autumn term, we decided it may be more beneficial in the spring term when they had had some experience of organizing the lecture and seminar. We will report on this at the next meeting.

The use of the Forum space is rather piecemeal though it has developed over the Christmas period. This will be reviewed in the Spring term.