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Co-creating sustainability and responsibility: Exploring students perceptions of the classroom / workplace relationship

For: The Higher Education Academy

A Student Led Research Project

Our Students:

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- Lydia Jones

Staff:

- Marc Duffy
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Aims

- To explore the expectations of students
- To illuminate the *'best of'* experiences from the classroom
- To reflect on the practical usefulness of learning on employability

Sustainability and Responsible Business

Education - the macro perspective

- A growing population consumes an average of '*1.7 earths*' each year (CRM 2010)
- The population is expected to reach nine-billion by 2050 (Young and Ernst 2012)
- 93% of CEOs view sustainability as a business issue (KPMG 2018)
- 53% expecting to increase spending in this area.
- Business Schools Increasingly Committed to Sustainability (AACSB and PRME)

The academic perspective

- Higher Education *'can serve as a model of sustainability by integrating all aspects of campus life'* (Cortese 2003).
- Publications increasingly focus on sustainability and responsibility (Handy 2012).
- Millennials increasingly wish to work for organizations who take sustainability seriously and *'stand ready to take action'* (Cone 2019).

The practice perspective

Tutors interested in underpinning the importance of SRB with education in a way that generated conversations about the expectations of and experience of students.

- Education aligned with the steer towards graduate employment and future careers (Tomlinson, 2012; Williams, 2015)
- Understanding the lived experience of the classroom (Campbell, 2011)
- Using students reflection to understand the and narrow the distance between theory and practice (Bulpit and Martin, 2005)

Methods

- Guided by theory to **elevate the students perspective**
- Sample of second and final year students from a Northern Business School / Business studies course
- 5 students in total / mix of males and female
- Two had been on sandwich placement
- **All expressed an interest in the area at various points in their degree**
- Online module review / focus group to facilitate rich information with deep qualitative understanding through **an explicit focus on listening** (Cook-Sather, 2006).
- Analysis of emerging themes (Braun and Clarke 2012)

Emergent findings

- Emergent interest in and appreciation of sustainable business expressed in classroom
- Intrinsic interest expressed interest in classroom (debate, free speech, exploration, application, currency)
- Interest developed through classroom and placement (experimenting with ideas / theory in the 'real world', seeking SRB organisations, considering perspectives, hearing of others / tutors work experience)
- Interest developed from placement - having an impact in a way not possible in all areas of business,
- Influencing teaching through placement - emphasis on practice, oriented towards measurement and evaluation, extending principles of fairness and equity)

Student Understanding, Impact and Outcomes



Next steps

- Greater emphasis on organisational practice, measurement and evaluation
- Retaining replicating elements of learning (debating current topics / exploring perspectives)
- Replicating proactive and listening - Incorporating the view of students scholars / leading professionals

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