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Improving Teaching: Enhancing Learning, Higher Education & Workplace Learning

Diversity and higher education practices

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Outline of session

- Outline of the projects
- Common themes emerging
- Key questions for discussion
- Feedback from the discussion
- Session summary

The projects

Learning and teaching for social diversity and difference in HE



Key findings

- Student diversity is multi-faceted. Students do not fit simplistic constructions of the 'traditional' or 'non-traditional' student.
- Teachers' pedagogic practice is influenced by their beliefs about students, their own education experiences and their ways of knowledge generation in subject and professional communities.
- Some university teachers adopt student-centred approaches to address the needs of their diverse student populations;
- Student-centred approaches must also engage thoughtfully with student diversity.
- In the case of a minority of teachers, there was a difference between espoused views about addressing diversity and actual teaching practices.

The projects

Investigating musical performance [IMP]:
Comparative studies in advanced musical learning.



Key findings:

- 'Other-than-classical' musicians (jazz, popular, traditional) have common developmental biographies. Western classical musicians tend to have a different profile. This difference can be both strength and weakness.
- Gender is important in learning approaches. Male and female musicians exhibit group differences that cut across musical genres.
- Musical self-efficacy and perceptions of expertise increase with wide experience, particularly in a portfolio career of performing and teaching.
- Musical performance anxiety is common, especially for female and Western classical musicians.
- An ideal institutional culture is inspirational, facilitates academic, professional and personal development and fosters a supportive community of learning, whilst allowing the development and pursuit of personal interests.

The projects



Keeping open the door to mathematically demanding programmes in F&HE

Key findings:

- programmes can make a difference (to drop out rate and to the value of mathematics for students)
- 'Connectionist' teaching can make a difference to students dispositions and understanding (especially for students with lower grades)
- the culture of performativity in Colleges reinforces teaching to the test that can be damaging

Common themes



- Students as individuals bring their knowledge, experience and identities to learning in HE. They also bring their hopes and aspirations for the future. Teaching **MUST** engage with the diversity of student needs and interests in order to engage them in meaningful learning.
- Student diversity is multi-faceted. Students do not fit simplistic constructions of the 'traditional' or 'non-traditional' student. Some university teachers adopt approaches to learning and teaching and engage thoughtfully with the needs of their diverse student populations
- Teachers' capacity to do so is mediated by their conceptions of their subject, their beliefs about students, and their role as teacher within the institutional and disciplinary context.
Tensions between these may influence student engagement

Discussion questions

1. How common are these themes?
In what ways do/can we engage pedagogically with student diversity and individual differences in a mass HE system?
2. How can we - in our different roles- negotiate conflicting policy and institutional agendas in ways that better support teaching and learning of all students?
3. How can government agencies, institutional leaders, teachers and students work together to support teaching and learning of all students?



Session summary

- This session considered the ways in which HE programmes and pedagogy engage students from different social, cultural and educational backgrounds.
 - Programmes and pedagogy need to be carefully designed in order to value different knowledge and experiences, and to address individual learner needs and interests.
 - Institutional teaching strategies based on a narrow range of learning outcomes, an emphasis on 'efficiency', and / or a deficit view of 'non-traditional students' can limit the development of inclusive teaching and learning strategies.
 - This has implications for student engagement, their disposition for further study in the subject, progression and retention. It also has implications for teacher development and organisational change
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