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Professional growth blossoms social change

Plant social enterprise ideas in a sunny place, cultivate the key competences and water the learning.

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BACKGROUND

Social Enterprise (SE) is a great option for students to grow professional skills, to develop interests into a project or a business, while contributing to social change. I have developed and run the Grow your Ideas Workshop to actively engage students with the SE concept and to motivate them to find ways for professional development while at University. According to MMU Graduate Outcomes (2015), professionalism is characterised by initiative, creativity, motivation, professional practice and self-management. During the workshops, students reflected on their interests and skills, collaborated in developing ideas for projects and considered skills they will need to grow, in order to turn their ideas into sustainable projects. In the Cheshire campus greenhouse, students planted the 'seed' that represented an idea, skill or a project that they would like to grow. The physical activity of planting and growing acted as metaphor for growing ideas and developing key competencies, such as learning to learn, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship and social and civic competence (Official Journal of The European Union, 2006). The metaphor of planting a seed became a first action in the professional development and a growing plant aimed to continue to motivate students to take further actions that enhance their professional development. The motivational potential of creativity has been described as the power to act while acquiring the skills, confidence and opportunities to make ideas a reality (Taylor 2004, cited in Nerantzi and James, 2015).

AIMS:

To facilitate students' reflection on the growth of their Social Enterprise idea and their professional development. To use the tangible metaphor of growing plants and the creation of digital stories will continue to engage students and motivate them to act upon their ideas.

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will establish areas for professional development within a Social Enterprise context.
- Students will participate in an interactive greenhouse activity and create a tangible metaphor for their idea.
- Students will create a digital story using the metaphor of the 'growing plant' as a tool for reflection on the development of their Social Enterprise project.

METHODOLOGY:

- Papert's Constructionism is concerned with the idea of knowledge as actively constructed by people's interaction with the world and hands on exploration. Expressing ideas through making physical, allowing them to become tangible and sharable which further inform them. Self-directed learning is encouraged by a conversation based around created artefacts, imagining new environments and bringing new tools, media and technologies into learning. Constructionism is concerned with the dynamics of change, to help to prepare the learner for the constantly changing world (Ackermann, 2001).
- Use of metaphor of 'growing plants' as a tool for reflection on professional development and the development of an idea (Owen, 2001, Moon, 2010).

References:
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#mmusocialenterprise

Engaged participants in reflection on the growth of their ideas and professional development through 'digital' conversation. This # aims at building a network of students and staff for mutual support while growing ideas and possible collaboration.



RESULTS

The workshop brought together students and staff who collaboratively developed ideas for solving social problems. The variety of participants brought various background to the group allowing development of diverse ideas. The greenhouse activity brought lots of energy and sparked conversations about importance of creating opportunities by students and staff to enhance student experience on the campus and help with gaining entrepreneurial and employability skills. Because of the innovation, two students and two staff applied for SE awards to start projects that will benefit other students and local communities.

Results continue

Reflections and ideas developed in the workshop were represented through a metaphor of a growing plant. Here participants engaged in two ways:



The physical activity of planting - symbolised taking action, growing something, making something happen – the physical nature of the activity, which differed from lecture or seminar setting allowed to create an energy and enthusiasm. The social setting motivated and inspired students to take actions in growing their ideas and skills. A reflection of a student suggest that innovation has helped him to see the necessity of finding opportunities to realise his ideas, not holding back, testing them, making them tangible. As this will allow him to nurture and grow his ideas and skills to harvest the crops. <https://twitter.com/marcinwozniak/status/610161601601601601> Naiman (2014) describes creativity as the act of turning new and imaginative ideas into reality, which involve two processes: thinking and producing.



The metaphor of a growing plant represented a developed idea or a skill making it tangible. The use of Twitter #mmusocialenterprise via which participants uploaded the story of their growing plant, was partly successful due to lack of participation or continue of uploading the images.

Use of # helped me to capture a digital story of growing plants planted in the greenhouse, which I will be able to use as a metaphor for professional growth in future sessions.

Conclusions

Implementing the innovation was an enjoyable experience, fun and relaxing nature of a planting activity allowed participants to bond and experience an unusual setting of the greenhouse. Low participating number of students in the activity caused by the fact that students were leaving the campus after the exam before the end of term. This signalled the need for creating reasons for students to stay on the campus. To share my reflection on this innovation, I introduced it to staff throughout the summer. Growing something for the first time, engagement and taking responsibility for cultivation of the plant, brought enthusiastic reactions and interaction with other staff. This experience gave me confidence that the innovation of growing plants can be a successful tool in engaging students with SE. Encouraged by the innovation, staff across the disciplines will collaborate on the development of the greenhouse as a hub where students will collaboratively grow produce and start educational, employability and entrepreneurial projects concerned with nutrition, sustainability and community aspects. Staff will collaborate with students on the running of the greenhouse to make project sustainable. Example of good practice of student – staff collaboration can be seen CELT

Recommendations

To allow more time within the workshop to reflect on the greenhouse activity and to explore ways of creating a digital story using other online platforms.

To develop the metaphor of a Growing Plant into a an animated—digital story that explains ways for professional development through running a Social Enterprise project

To collaborate with colleagues across university to develop an 'I love learning' campaign that engages students with aspects of professional development. Through fun activities, this campaign will be concerned with the development of new skills, learning how to acquire knowledge and most importantly by promoting ways by which those skills could be developed in a range of situations (Moon, 2010).

