Students as mentors: Changing the next generation

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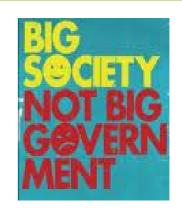Ian Mathews imathews@lincoln.ac.uk
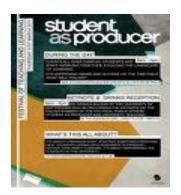
Background to the study

- Small scale piece of qualitative research funded by the Social Policy and Social Work subject centre, HEA;

- Undertaken by small team from University of Lincoln, School of Health and Social Care from September 2010 – June 2011;

- Working with a project called JUMP run by CfBT Education Trust and funded by Lincolnshire County Council;

- JUMP annually recruit student volunteers from the University of Lincoln and Bishop Grosseteste University College, Lincoln, to mentor children looked after by the local authority (LAC);

- The research focussed on two JUMP projects; JUMP for Success (10 week programme) and JUMP Free (weekend residential);

- Outputs on SWAPBox.

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Why now?

- Political context of 'Big Society' (Cabinet Office 2010) and 'giving' white paper (HM Government 2011);

- Students as producers (Healey and Jenkins 2009; Neary 2009; Taylor and Wilding 2009);

- Lack of research about mentoring using e-technology (Rainer *et al* 2008).

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Context

- Benefits to mentors –

  - relating theory to practice;
  - citizenship;
  - professional values;
  - social awareness;
  - job satisfaction;
  - increased remuneration;
  - enhanced career pathways.

  (Schmidt *et al*, 2004; Philip and Spratt, 2007; Kafai *et al*, 2008; Boon, 1998; Allen *et al*, 2006; Liu *et al,* 2009)

- Stepping stone into professional practice (Philip and Spratt, 2007) – employability; sustainable workforce.

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Methods

- Focus groups with student mentors, interviews with key stakeholders;

- The creative use of Web 2.0 technologies to collect data;

- An on-going reflective account of student mentor experiences on a blog;

- Anonymised individual case studies exemplifying the work students were undertaking;

- Further data was also generated through the production of vodcasts, which captured the views of mentors at an 'away-day' event organised to celebrate the conclusion of the JUMP projects.

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However…

- Contributions to the blog were sporadic and sometimes lacking in depth and quality;

- Despite encouragement, written and verbal guidance on content and process, engagement was limited, with the exception of a small number of students;

- The research team hypothesised that some students may have felt discouraged from contributing due to the quality of some early writing placed on the blog, or potentially the team had overestimated students' understanding and use of virtual fora.

SWAPBox

Vodcasts

Case Studies

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Other outputs

- Vodcasts as shown;

- Summarised, anonymous case studies;

- This presentation;

- Guidance notes for educators;

- The final report.

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Findings

Analysis led to four key themes

□ Reasons for engaging with mentoring;

□ Challenges of mentoring;

□ Gains from mentoring;

□ Preparation for professional practice.

Summary of research conclusions

- The need to consider whether volunteering activity could be usefully incorporated into the core curriculum particularly for professional programmes (at undergraduate or postgraduate levels);

- Using this research to inform and encourage future student mentors;

- Questioning whether the gains from mentoring (particularly insight into learning and developing meaningful reflections) differ in undergraduate and postgraduate students – more research needed!

- Questioning how far volunteering activity can 'add value' to learning in HE with regard to future employability in contemporary context.

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Using SWAPBox

- Valuable repository of outputs – sharing and disseminating;

- Allows our participants to gain access to the outputs easily (depending on access level set up – and ethical considerations);

- Useful way to connect with others doing similar work.

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