Facilitating Community Engaged Learning

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Introduction to Community Engaged Learning (CEL)

Community Engaged Learning (CEL) is used to describe pedagogical approaches that aim to achieve both academic and civic outcomes for students, while making a meaningful contribution to both local and global communities through reciprocal partnerships. In this way, CEL is a form of experiential learning that places students in partnerships with community and industry partners, and includes elements of Community engaged learning (CEL), Community Based Research (CBR), and Community Engaged Scholarship (CES).

Constructivists (1970s) suggest that learners construct knowledge and meaning from circumstances where they have experienced that knowledge, with the construction being viewed as an on-going interpretive process reinforced by past and on-going experiences. That means that people come to understand the world by what they already know and believe; it also means that different people may develop different understandings from the same learning experience. Interaction with others also forms a powerful source of meaning too. The term socio-cultural constructivism” was coined to describe the process of learning in a social context (Senge, 1990)

Community Engaged Learning is not about the addition of engagement to learning, but rather the integration of engagement with learning. In these settings, the students’ observations and experiences in the community are as integral to the students’ academic learning as class lectures and library research (Howard, 1998, p. 21). Through their engagement experiences and reflection, academic learning is informed and transformed, and the academic learning informs and transforms the engagement experience, creating a reciprocal relationship between service and learning (Howard, 1998, p. 21).

Effective engaged learning pedagogies “induce the learner to look carefully at her experience, to question her own assumptions, to place the experience in relation to larger institutional and societal processes and discourses, to hear others’ voices, to grapple with the question of why things happen the way they do, to imagine how things might be different, to read her experience in terms given by major social theories and to critique those theories from the perspective of her experience – to engage, in other words, in serious critical thinking.” (Moore, 2013, pp. 201-202)

Facilitating Community Engaged Learning

**Key Messages**

⇒ The role of the teacher is a facilitator of knowledge rather than a controller of knowledge.
⇒ Learning by doing is at the centre of discovery.
⇒ The learner is engaged in on-going reflection on what is being experienced for effective learning.
⇒ Learners help to direct and shape the learning experiences.
⇒ New knowledge, concepts and skills are linked in meaningful ways to the learner’s personal experiences.
⇒ Abstract learning contexts towards a more coherent integration with ‘real’ contexts such as workplaces.
⇒ Learners have an opportunity to collaborate and negotiate in determining their learning and assessment processes.
⇒ Learners are ‘co-producers’ of new knowledge and skills.
⇒ Prior learning and life experiences of learners are valuable foundations for constructing new knowledge and skill sets.
Nature of Knowledge and Community Engaged Learning

Knowledge can refer to a theoretical or practical understanding of a subject. It can be implicit (as with practical skill or expertise) or explicit (as with the theoretical understanding of a subject (Oxford Dictionary, 2016); it can be more or less formal or systematic. Raelin (2016) highlighted the need for alignment between self-knowledge, knowledge of other and action. According to Illeris (2009) knowledge is “Not something to be remembered and recalled but something that has become part of the person” (p.142)

Situated knowledge can be broadly defined as knowledge embedded within a social, historical, cultural and political time and place that reflects contextual features and lived experiences. It is based on the premise that we possess expertise, tacit and explicit knowledge about our lived contextualized experience that needs to be surfaced and understood (Polanyi, 1966), and encompasses a ‘knowing-from-within’ that is continually (re)formed as we experience and deal with situations (Shotter, 2010).

Teachers as facilitators of Engaged Learning

Smith and Blake (2005) saw teachers as facilitators of learning, with the learner playing an active role in construction of knowledge. Eight characteristics of facilitative teaching were noted: an emphasis on the workplace as a meaningful learning context; interactive approaches to cognitive and performative aspects of learning; work-ready learning outcomes; learner collaboration in determining learning and assessment processes; learners as co-producers of knowledge; recognition of prior learning; flexible teaching strategies for different learning styles; and social interaction as integral to the learning process towards a more learner-centred, work-centred and attribute-focused pedagogy. They noted a focus on developing and transforming people, with teachers using multiple pedagogical strategies to serve the needs of learners and contexts.

According to Brewster (2016), community engaged learning requires “pedagogical strategies that identify students interest (disciplinary/personal), consider prior experiences and include student identified learning outcomes”.
Community Engaged Learning  
Key approaches and components

FLIPPED LEARNING
Flipping the classroom is a “pedagogy-first” approach to teaching. In this approach in-class time is “re-purposed” for inquiry, application and assessment in order to better meet the needs of the individual learners.

SITUATED LEARNING
Learning is situated, meaning it is a social process shaped by the context and the culture in which it takes place (Lave and Wenger 1991). Situated learning encourages participative teaching environments in which knowledge is created through the interaction of the learner with others and the environment. Students learn through activities, rather than knowledge transfer, and the context of learning echoes real-world experiences for which students are being prepared. (Stein, 1998)

NEGOTIATED LEARNING
Students in a situated learning environment such as a community of practice are interdependent learners, where the inter nature of the learner reflects the distributed nature of their learning practices; learning is not simply the result of a teaching curriculum, but it occurs from participation in a given practice. Thus, negotiated meaning, learning and identity development are linked. Communities of practice enable students to negotiate and renegotiate the meaning of tutor constructed artefacts, and, by looking out from their community towards institutional learning environments, students are changed as learners, so developing their learning strategies and professional identities (Orsmond & Merry, 2017)

PHRONESIS
Greenwood (2008) discusses the form of knowledge generation phronesis, which seems very pertinent to student community engagement. Phronesis differs from episteme (disciplinary knowledge) and tekhe (technical knowledge): “phronesis can be understood as the design of problem-solving actions through collaborative knowledge construction with the legitimate stakeholders in the problem” (Greenwood, 2008, p. 327). Greenwood views phronesis as being generated in a collaborative context where local knowledge from the community stakeholders is combined with the knowledge of the professional researcher to define the problem.

STUDENT CENTRED LEARNING
Student-centered pedagogy contains elements that promote student-directed learning (e.g. individual choice, self-expression, independent thinking), as opposed to teacher-centered pedagogy in which teachers direct and organize the flow of information, with little to no contribution from the students (Kember and McNaught 2007).

REFLECTION
Reflection refers to the processes that a learner undergoes to look back on his past learning experiences and what he did to enable learning to occur (i.e. self-reflection on how learning took place), and the exploration of connections between the knowledge that was taught and the learner’s own ideas about them (i.e. self-reflection on what was learned). It is contended that since processes such as these can lead to informed and thoughtful deliberations on one’s behaviours and actions, they are believed to assist learners to become better at self-reflection, which leads subsequently to better academic achievement (Lew et al, 2011)

GRADUATE ATTRIBUTE DEVELOPMENT
These attributes include teamwork skills and being able to think both critically and independently. Graduate attributes have been defined by Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell, and Watts (2000, p. 3) as: the qualities, skills and understandings [that] include but go beyond the disciplinary expertise or technical knowledge that has traditionally formed the core of most university courses. They are qualities that also prepare graduates as agents of social good in an unknown future.
COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING
A Practicum Student Experience

FLIPPED LEARNING

SITUATED LEARNING

CREATION, CO-CONSTRUCTION AND APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

NEGOTIATED LEARNING

RHIZOMATIC LEARNING

RECIPROCITY

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OPPORTUNISTIC LEARNING

It is possible to identify three kinds of informal learning: self-directed (conscious and intentional), incidental (conscious and unintentional), and socialisation (unconscious and unintentional) (Duguid et al. 2013). Much of the learning that arises from civic participation is unplanned and spontaneous (Ilseley 1990), commonly incidental learning (Ross-Gordon and Dowling 1995).

RECIPIROCITY

As with social justice, reciprocity is an important, yet debated element of effective community engaged learning (Dostilio et al., 2012; Jacoby, 2015). Dostilio et al. (2012) regard reciprocity as ‘a foundational concept in service learning’ (p. 18). It can be defined as adherence to principles of ‘respect, trust, genuine commitment, balancing power, sharing resources and clear communication’ (Jacoby, 2015, p. 247). Dostilio et al. (2012) propose three orientations towards reciprocity: exchange, influence, and generatively orientated reciprocity.

RHIZOMATIC LEARNING

This invokes the biological metaphor of a rhizome, likening learning to the roots of a plant. The roots can spread out laterally and horizontally, consisting of a series of nodes, with no distinct centre, beginning or end, and no defined boundary – the only restrictions to growth are those that exist in the surrounding habitat. Rhizomes resist organisational structure and chronology and instead grow and propagate in a ‘nomadic’ fashion. Seen as a model for the construction of knowledge, rhizomatic processes hint at the interconnectedness of ideas as well as boundless exploration across many fronts from many different starting points. (Deleuse and Guattari, 1987)

CREATION, CO-CONSTRUCTION AND APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Baroutsis et al (2016) draw on a combined understanding of ‘voice’, ‘pedagogy’ and ‘engagement’, conceiving of it as ‘pedagogic voice’ to identify a space within the literature where they were able to discuss students active engagement, participation and voice in the areas of teaching, learning and the curriculum. Inventive curriculum design, embedded in communities, creates new perspectives that can ripple through and change community practices (Heard 2014). This design approach, positions curriculum planners, lecturers, community members, and students as co-authors in knowledge making, acknowledging that self-authorship is central to a twenty-first-century tertiary education (Heard 2014). According to Baxter- Magolda (2004), students should no longer be viewed as passive consumers of third level education but instead should be considered by educators as co-creators of knowledge and drivers of social change.

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

Knowledge was viewed by the lecturers as a “broader construct than purely acquisition to one which encompasses knowledge that impacts on the whole person” Transformative learning requires deep learning and critical reflection (Illeris,2014 Mezirow and Taylor 2009). It is seen as “a process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action” (Mezirow,2012, p75)

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY

“Learning their way out” an environmentally literate person, both individually and together with others, makes informed decisions concerning the environment; is willing to act on these decisions to improve the well-being of other individuals, societies, and the global environment; and participates in civic life. Those who are environmentally literate possess, to varying degrees:

- Knowledge and understanding of a wide range of environmental concepts, problems, and issues;
- A set of cognitive and affective dispositions;
- A set of cognitive skills and abilities;
- The appropriate behavioural strategies to apply such knowledge and understanding in order to make sound and effective decisions in a range of environmental contexts. (Roth, 1968)
References


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Myers (2006) believes it has been regarded as an approach to teaching that encourages students to grapple with disorienting dilemmas, critically examine their assumptions related to the contradictory information, seek out additional perspectives, and ultimately acquire new knowledge, attitudes and skills in light of these reflections – all in order to experience personal and intellectual growth.


