

student as producer

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Students as co-researchers in epistemic communities: new forms of engagement and knowledge construction

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Abstract

This paper considers the role of students in participating in research in epistemic communities as valued contributors to new forms of knowledge and practice. Engagement is a key concern in higher education (Trowler, 2010). Frequently, definitions imply normative 'requirements' where engagement is seen as a mechanism for improving individual attitudes to learning. By contrast, epistemic engagement understands knowledge and learning as practices within the structure of a domain and disciplinary community. Such knowledge building practices are typical of disciplinary communities and constructed through a wide range of opportunities for intellectual engagement and interaction (Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt, 2006). Inquiry-based activities in the undergraduate curriculum have long been seen as beneficial to student learning in encouraging active engagement. A more radical rethinking of what constitutes 'the student experience' has led to the 'student as producer' movement (Neary & Winn, 2009) where joint production of socially important knowledge is emphasised. This paper reports on a growing area of co-researcher models that builds on these ideas, in particular in research on digital media in undergraduate education. Past and current studies will show how the research approach has been adopted, highlighting practical implications and key challenges including power relations, differences in purposes, accreditation, assessment constraints and equality of access and involvement.

We conclude that collaborative research models are mutually beneficial, providing opportunities for authentic research, relevant to and valued by students' epistemic community. This approach can also lead to the development of new relationships, knowledge and research expertise and increased opportunities for authenticity.

Presenter details

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Dr Sue Timmis is a Senior Lecturer in Technology Enhanced Learning in the Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol. She leads the centre for Learning, Knowing and Interactive Technologies. Research interests include the role of digital media in mediating new forms of discourse, collaboration and knowledge construction and in empowering disadvantaged or disenfranchised groups. Much of her work employs co-researcher and participatory research methodologies. She is co-director (with Jane Williams) of the Tel-me research programme and has a new project investigating the role of digital media in fostering a culture of belonging amongst students from non-traditional backgrounds.

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