

Engaged Learning: Voices Across Europe

Mary Griffith (Ed.)

IDC Impact Series 5



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Antwerpen | Apeldoorn | Portland

M. Griffith
Antwerpen | Apeldoorn | Portland
Maklu
2022

96 pag. - 24 x 16 cm
ISBN 978-90-466-1177-7
D/2022/1997/40
NUR: 820 and 840
BISAC: EDU000000 and LAW000000
Theme: JND and LNX



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Maklu-Publishers

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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

The CaST project, supported by the EU's ERASMUS + Programme, includes partners in six European countries: Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom. The views expressed are purely the authors' own and do not reflect the views of the European Commission.

Abstract

There are growing calls for Higher Education Institutions to become more civically engaged and socially relevant in their local regions. The central aim of the Communities and Students Together (CaST) project has been to advance our knowledge and understanding of the myriad forms of Engaged Learning and to develop a deeper understanding of engagement. The project highlighted the diversity and flexibility to be found within Engaged Learning initiatives in each of the participating universities. The examples provided range widely in their structure and intended outcomes. However, the one constant is each initiative's commitment to a concept where reciprocity between the students, universities, and communities, is prioritised.

This volume includes discussions on the practical methodology, pedagogical strategies and approaches of Engaged Learning, as well as perspectives from both higher education institutes and communities, of the benefits of Engaged Learning in different contexts. The authors have chosen the title: 'Voices across Europe'- in order to represent the wide range of stakeholders' perspectives involved in Engaged Learning.

This anthology is the culmination of the Erasmus+project Communities and Students Together (CaST) and provides an opportunity for leaders in the field of Engaged Learning, as well as representatives from civic and civil society and Higher Education Institutes, to gain new insights into the area of Engaged Learning. The outputs of the CaST project, including the innovations developed and piloted by the project partners, will frame this volume.

Each chapter takes a specific perspective regarding Engaged Learning to further our understanding of the third mission of Higher Education Institutions, to share the lessons learnt, and explore the remaining challenges..

Keywords. Engaged Learning, Third mission, Community engagement, Student engagement.

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Acknowledgments

The editor, in the name of the CaST project, is grateful for the support of the EU's ERASMUS + Programme and recognizes the collaboration of the advisory board in the compilation of this volume.

Advisory board and affiliation

Lindsey Anderson¹, Alexander Chmelka², Sarah Dyer¹, Joel Freedman⁷, Nicola Frost⁸, Mary Griffith³, Noel Klima⁴, Laura Mäki⁵, Courtney Marsh⁴, Philipp Pohlenz², Sampo Ruoppila⁵, Pirjo Turtainen⁵



¹University of Exeter (United Kingdom)

²Otto-von-Guericke-Universität Magdeburg (Germany)

³Universidad de Málaga (Spain)

⁴Universiteit Gent (Belgium)

⁵University of Turku (Finland)

⁶Freedman Design Services

⁷Devon Community Foundation



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About the Editor

Mary Griffith is a PhD lecturer working with applied linguistics, communication strategies, and bilingualism at the Universidad de Málaga, Spain. She has coordinated the bilingual degree in the Education Faculty, given a wide range of professional development seminars for university faculty and staff, and collaborated with research projects dealing with language processing, aphasia, and the relationship between paralinguistic features and effective communication. Dr. Griffith has collaborated with the research group *Applied Languages and Linguistics* since 2011. Her research takes place in the context of multi-cultural communication and is grounded on a firm belief in promoting interdisciplinary approaches in higher education. Multilinguals can create a social space where they are free to connect whichever tools they have gathered—ranging from personal history, experience and environment, attitude, as well as, cognitive and physical capacity—to form coordinated and meaningful interactions. Within the translanguaging space that has been generated, the isolation of each individual language is not present. Instead, it provides an environment where all languages merge and results in completely new ideas and practices and truly unique engagement. Most recently she has been a researcher in the CaST ERASMUS + Programme where this ‘translanguaging space’ is ever present.

ENGAGED LEARNING: VOICES ACROSS EUROPE

Preface

Mary Griffith (Ed.)

This anthology is the culmination of the Erasmus+project Communities and Students Together (CaST) and provides an opportunity for leaders in the field of Engaged Learning, as well as representatives from civic and civil society and Higher Education Institutes, to gain new insights into the area of Engaged Learning. The outputs of the CaST project, including the innovations developed and piloted by the project partners, will frame this volume.

The truth is Engaged Learning is complex, it involves multiple stakeholders, multiple directions and multiple actions and, in the case of CaST, multiple universities in multiple countries. Engaged Learning tries to shed light on these varied perspectives and oftentimes finds that Engaged Learning means different things to different people. CaST has given us many ways to explore perspectives across Europe and many lessons have been learnt. In this volume, we connect the ‘voices’: from the Higher Educational Institutions, from student perspectives, from our own as faculty/researchers, as well as those from the community.

We will discuss Engaged Learning in the context of CaST. This is a broad topic, and we begin by simply stating that Engaged Learning is about moving from good intentions to actions. Chapter one will provide an overview of stakeholders and discuss the trans-disciplinary approach where these intentions are turned into actions. By discussing our actions, we aim to establish a starting point for lessons learnt.

We frame the idea that Engaged Learning is about actions born from good intentions. When we begin with good intentions, it is perhaps easier to find consensus. For the institution, Engaged Learning lies under the category of ‘lofty goals.’ Oftentimes, in Higher Education Institutions we see Engaged Learning alongside other lofty goals: internationalisation, inclusion or equality, social responsibility, employability or sustainability. Indeed, Engaged Learning is a mindset of good intentions. But this is but the beginning. The institution must support Engaged Learning beyond the mission statement. Engaged Learning does not seem to work top down, but it cannot survive without institutional support. Chapter two will discuss the pros and cons of institutionalising Engaged Learning, with a focus on the University of Exeter where they have used design thinking to understand what structural changes need to be made to support this pedagogical approach.

Engaged Learning involves looking at the community as final users of student led projects. When we turn our attention to students, we observe that project-based learning is key to developing skills and expertise. University students are expected to put theoretical knowledge into practice. As we move from intentions

to actions, our concerns become more pragmatic, but also more realistic, more doable. Engaged Learning asks the tough questions such as what applications can my studies have outside the University? And who are the final users of my projects? Students seem to respond better to initiatives embedded in the curriculum and clearly students' perspectives must be explored within their degrees, but also after graduation. Marsh and Klima discuss Engaged Learning by targeting early career researchers before they move into the community or further academic roles with their project at Ghent University.

One of the main goals of this anthology is to share the lessons learnt and remaining challenges. In "Headstand stories" Chmelka playfully suggests there are things not to do. The chapter is a humorous self-reflection on one's own shortcomings and mistakes, but also always encourages readers to consider how one could have done it better. The intention of Engaged Learning is a way for the University to reach out to the community and to build bridges between stakeholders through a series of actions. But how we do so, varies widely. It is important that we examine the stakeholders by making key connections with the community. Furthermore, as the Turku team highlights in Chapter five, managing expectations should be an obligatory part, when involving the community partners.

The community doesn't necessarily need to think about curriculum, employability or even research. The community cares about solving, sometimes urgent, problems. They are concerned with how to create working networks where good intentions become real actions. Chapter six discusses the relationship between the academy and the community and offers recommendations for how we can improve this engagement from the community perspective. "For genuine partnership to flourish and endure, it must be founded, not in paternalism, or limited transactional connection, but in mutual benefit (Frost, 2022, this volume). It is through our relationships with community partners, that Engaged Learning builds these connections for actions to take place.

We close the volume with some final remarks about the 3-year project as a whole and the purposeful idea that Engaged Learning is part of the solution for many good intentions. It is an active problem-seeking, problem-solving venture. We encourage all stakeholders to think about their role in what is left to be done and to bring their expertise to the problem-solving table. We further encourage them to work within their classrooms, within their institutions, and within their community to turn these good intentions into actions.



1 Engaged learning: Turning good intentions into actions

Mary Griffith

Universidad de Málaga, Spain

Abstract

This chapter includes discussions on the practical methodology, pedagogical strategies and approaches of Engaged Learning, as well as perspectives from both higher education institutes and communities, of the benefits of Engaged Learning in different contexts. The authors have chosen the title: 'Voices across Europe'- in order to represent the wide range of stakeholders' perspectives involved in Engaged Learning.

To create some context using the CaST project, it is the goal of this first chapter to frame the volume as well as the term, to generate some lessons learnt and explore new directions for the future of Engaged Learning. We aim to touch upon the stakeholders involved in Engaged Learning to reveal small successes as well as to uncover existing challenges. A true understanding of trans-disciplinary approaches will prove crucial as we move forward.

Key words: Engaged Learning, Trans-disciplinary Approaches, Project-based Learning

1.1 Introduction

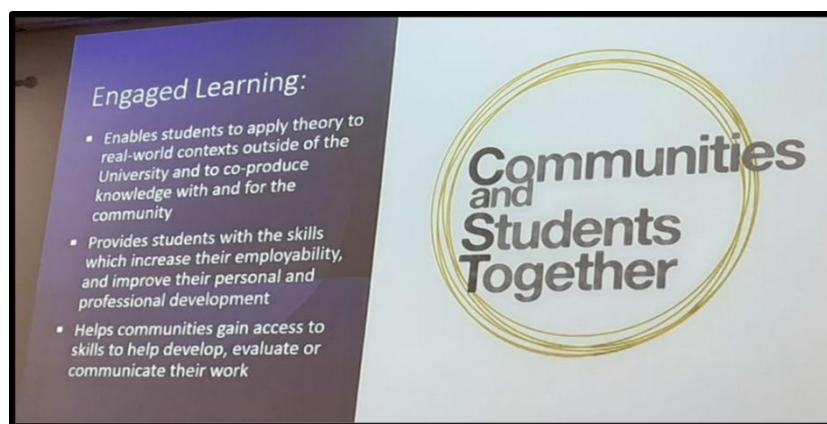
Engaged Learning is a type of experiential learning which has evolved from Service-Learning. Nowadays, Engaged Learning has become a broader, more inclusive umbrella term (Lund et al., 2017, p. 652) for the pedagogical approach that enables students to derive learning from meaningful community engagement while working on real world problems. It is based on the principle of reciprocity and recognises the experience held by those outside of academia.

The EU Erasmus + funded project Communities and Students Together (CaST: 2019-1-UK01-KA203-061463) looked at 28 separate examples of Engaged Learning across the six countries, to take an in depth look at examples of Engaged Learning from within each of the six universities represented throughout Europe (Anderson et al., 2022). Highlighted is the diversity and flexibility to be found within Engaged Learning initiatives in each of the

participating universities. The examples provided range rather widely in their structure and intended outcomes.

However, the one constant is each initiative's commitment to a concept where reciprocity between the students, universities, and communities, is prioritised. Clearly, we have learnt different things from these varying contexts. On the whole the initiatives met their goals by reaching out into the community and reaping mutual benefits for participants. Figure 1 provides a definition given at the multiplier event in Málaga, 2022.

Figure 1. CaST overview, Multiplier Event, Málaga, Anderson, 2022.



It is the goal of this chapter to provide some closure for CaST and continue the generate debate as we move forward with Engaged Learning. In this volume, we aim to touch upon the stakeholders involved in Engaged Learning to reveal small successes as well as to uncover existing challenges. A true understanding of trans-disciplinary approaches will prove crucial as we move forward.

1.2 Context and Stakeholders

Through this project we have contextualized Engaged Learning in six universities. It has given us an opportunity to explore the enormous potential of Engaged Learning in a range of circumstances. In a way, Engaged Learning is about continually learning in a purposeful search to find solutions to real-world problems. These experiences are as wide and varied as can be expected.

Gregory et al. (2020) has identified two different approaches to understanding stakeholders. Instrumental approaches view stakeholder engagement with a specific goal in mind and usually support tangible objectives such as a project, or even profitability or growth. In contrast, a more critical view of stakeholder

theory rests on the premise that all values need to be considered in a “pragmatic and pluralistic” way (Freeman et al., 2004, p. 365).

So, indeed, Engaged Learning reaches beyond the University. There are stakeholders and experts with expertise from different fields that come together with a shared community interest or specific problem to solve. The doors of universities, representing a boundary between the relatively safe and autonomous academic institutional world, and the complex, multi-stakeholder society, literally have to be opened (Oonk et al., 2020).

Gregory et al. (2020) suggest that the weighting of stakeholders is an emergent property. In the case of CaST we cite four main groups for any Engaged Learning initiative. They are 1) institution; 2) faculty; 3) community; and, 4) students. In this way, each perspective must be fully explored to reveal the true benefits to mutual partnerships as well as to effectively manage expectations. With so many stakeholders there are multiple perspectives to be explored. The CaST Multiplier event in Málaga provided key insights to exploring these multiple perspectives (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Key insights to stakeholder perceptions afternoon workshop, Reflective practice (Málaga, 2022).



This egalitarian collaboration is crucial to our data collection, because meaningful data is useful and relevant to the whole group of participants. The contextual information can vary from country to country, from university to university, within each institution itself and the list goes on. In order to frame the context, we will centre the debate loosely, around a starting point of wide perspectives and ongoing issues for these four groups of stakeholders.

1.2.1 Stakeholders: The institution

Engaged Learning means different things to different people, so managing expectations is key. Some of the challenges, and therefore the solutions, are part

of the Higher Educational Institution (HEI) itself. The institution encompasses faculty, research, and students, while Engaged Learning looks outside the HEI for relevance, impact and benefits for the institution.

Across the EU, universities seek to engage. Science, Technology, and Innovation policy imperatives and principles such as “Responsible Research and Innovation” (RRI) and “Open Science and Innovation” often form part of the mission statements. This is largely in response to calls for greater public engagement with science and technology (Owen et al., 2012). The intentions underlying Engaged Learning are supported in mission statements, but there are remaining challenges as to which actions to pursue in implementation.

When asked about the biggest challenges to the institutionalisation of Engaged Learning, CaST members responded:

- “A common understanding of terms/ a common agenda, Translation between scientific disciplines, university sub-organisations and personal interests.”
- “Limited teaching resources. If group activity is considered, engaged learning approaches involve a considerable workload. (Individual internships, where guidance is the responsibility of the host institution, are a different matter.)”
- “The university lacks the understanding that Engaged Learning is more than volunteerism.”
- “An important challenge concerns the necessity to develop specific competences which allow subjects to implement and correctly exploit the opportunity of engaged learning.”
- “There is very little if any incentive given to teaching staff to embed Engaged Learning, which makes it more difficult overall to institutionalise it.”

Many times, Engaged Learning is implicit in existing initiatives such as social responsibility, employability, inclusion, etc., but it might not have an explicit mention. Across the EU, each university may well be closer or further away from institutionalisation of Engaged Learning.

Understanding the institutionalisation of Engaged Learning forms part of this process or, indeed, the phases of an ongoing process. Chapter two of this volume suggests that the Institutionalisation phase: involves operationalizing the structure, including governance, staffing, leadership, etc; clear demarcation of its functions; doing field work with communities; and monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes (see Anderson, Dyer & Freedman, this volume).

Engaged Learning does not seem to work top down, but cannot survive without institutional support. Perhaps one way to get around this conflict is for key stakeholders to target department heads so that solutions can begin at a context

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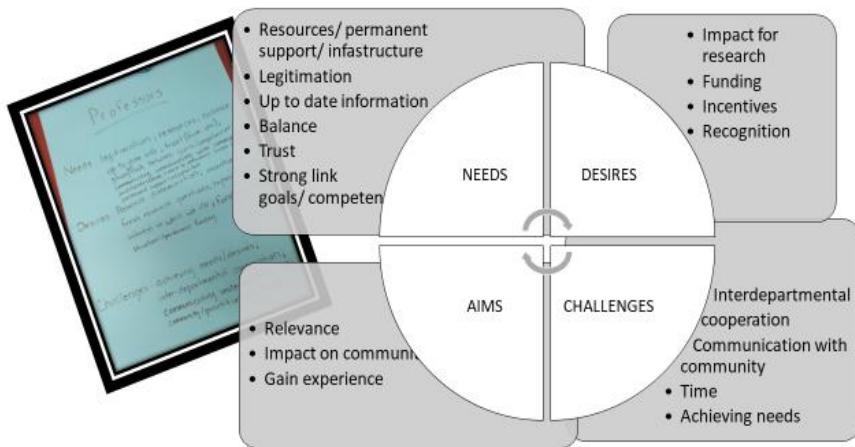
specific and more medial level. So, inserting Engaged Learning into the curriculum becomes seamless and commonplace.

1.2.2 Stakeholders: Faculty

Faculty also represent one of the main drivers for Engaged Learning and they will ultimately continue to play a key role in both pedagogy and research surrounding Engaged Learning. Higher education institutions are increasingly engaged with society, but contemporary higher education teacher competence profiles do not include university-society oriented responsibilities. Consequently, comprehensive insights in university-society collaborative performance of higher education teachers are not available.

At the CaST Multiplier event 2022, participants sat down to discuss needs, aims and challenges for faculty (Figure 3). Time and incentives seemed to be the most pressing issues. Crucially, how contents fit into Engaged Learning initiatives varies greatly across the disciplines. Faculty seem to have their research at the heart of the discussion, but not always collecting evidence to document the impact of Engaged Learning. This is because research means different things to different people. Each subject matter might well approach engagement in a range of ways.

Figure 3. Participants discuss needs, aims and challenges for faculty (CaST Multiplier event, 2022).



Neumann, Parry and Becher (2002) have described research in the hard subjects as “competitive, but gregarious” while in the humanities the research tendency is to be more solitary (p.p. 405-417). All of these beliefs impact on teaching style as well as on research style. In fact, in our model (Figure 3) interdepartmental cooperation is listed as a challenge, but it may well be part of the solution.

Where pedagogy and research come together varies from subject to subject. In my case, I have consistently felt that Engaged Learning was pulling me away from my research, but somehow it was more connected to the world outside academia. As a linguist, I must confess that Engaged Learning moves me away from my area of expertise as a researcher. So, if I embrace Engaged Learning as part of my courses, does that mean I have to take this up as a research construct? Should all professors include this in the course contents? Are our course contents always part of our research? How each person understands Engaged Learning and how they understand research may vary widely.

- “If I had to address a wide range of faculty and ‘sell’ them Engaged Learning, I would encourage them to bring their expertise to the community to make their research more relevant and bring Engaged Learning into their classrooms, to help students apply learning in real contexts.”

Turning all that into evidence-based practice will be part of the evaluation and is closely tied to sustainable funding. However, who will seek out this evidence-based practice is not clear.

The underlying incentive is funding, but the evidence-based practice should be carried out in a trans-disciplinary fashion. Faculty do not have time to see ‘new lines’ of investigation for the validation process.

1.2.3 Stakeholders: Community partners

Engaged Learning and time discrepancies lead to one of the biggest challenges to partnerships and, in fact, can be defined as the ‘elephant in the room.’ The community sees Engaged Learning in the context of specific needs, some of which are time sensitive, while the university works in semesters. Engaged Learning works well with project-based learning structures that directly involve community partners.

Again, we observe great variety in the community partnerships across the six universities. What stood out first was our differences. I was fascinated by the ease at which Germany and Finland seemed to have the community at the forefront of their mindset. The university and the community easily flowed together; they seemed to have ‘access’ to local government, while in Málaga we had a close connection to local schools. Perhaps the smaller cities have a closer network. It is unclear if the size of the institution or the city itself plays a role in the connection.

Belgium seemed to have institutional support for brokerage, something that is unheard of in Spain, where initiatives that get the limited funding are closely tied to specific projects with less regard for the matching process and longer-term commitment. In Málaga, community needs are part of the volunteer office which is extremely active. All degrees include 6 credits for this participation and

there are almost two hundred community partners with existing relationships. However, these do not necessarily form part of the curriculum.

Participants at the CaST Multiplier event cited interdisciplinary approaches as challenging and highlighted that developing trust with one contact person was one of the basic needs for Engaged Learning moving forward. We highlight these as they corroborate the utility of a broker as well as limitations to interdisciplinary connections.

What we have found after comparing our context to other EU partners is that brokerage becomes necessary. The educational broker is a facilitator who connects people, networks, organizations and resources to support change. Foorthuis & Rippen (2012) have referred to these partnerships between the university and the community as Regional Learning Environments (RLE). "From an educational design perspective, the RLE provides an authentic multi-stakeholder learning environment for students as well as for teachers from multiple educational programmes simultaneously" (Oonk et al., 2020, p. 704).

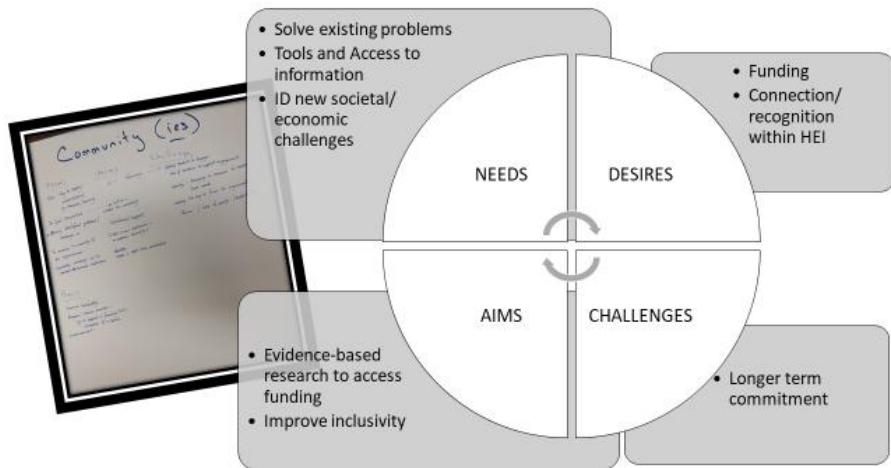
One of the biggest challenges to Engaged Learning initiatives and the community is the time commitment involved. The community's perspective of time is not one that fits nicely into semesters. When asked about challenges, CaST members responded:

- "Fitting the semester logic to non-university time regimes, Openness for the different ways of thinking in each case."
- "Managing expectations - they are involved, but the university must take the lead in defining how the topic is framed and how the collaboration will be run, in order to secure the needs of the curricula."
- "Time commitments differ among stakeholders, if there is no broker to manage expectations, many projects might be unfinished."
- "It may not be easy to involve the stakeholders, in particular if one does not have already established relationships."
- "Creating meaningful community relations and gaining first connections to the community you are trying to reach."

What these responses reveal is that mutually beneficial partnerships need a mutual understanding of differences. It is difficult to see the needs of partners without inserting those needs into one's own context. During the Multiplier event in Malaga (2022) participants explored the perspectives of key stakeholders to effectively understand the varying needs, aims and challenges to collaboration (Figure 4).

What is salient here is the contrast to the previous comments based on challenges. As we had included community voices in the workshop, we offered them an opportunity to discuss what is challenging about working with the university. While it is always crucial to uncover challenges, perhaps it is wiser to reveal needs and feasible goals.

**Figure 4. Participants explored the perspectives of community stakeholders
(CaST Multiplier event, 2022)**



1.2.4 Stakeholders: Students

As with the faculty, there seems to be a disconnect between pedagogy and research. Students have a role while in the university, but their real role will be when they leave. Students seek experience and employable skills. Student perspectives are closely tied to gaining experience and understanding the world outside the university context. If they can do so within the curriculum, they find a valuable incentive. Closely tied to pedagogy is the project-based learning model that is central to Engaged Learning. In Malaga, we found that a project-based learning structure in Engineering allowed for tangible products (Apps) and the Engaged Learning aspects considered in the final target stakeholders.

Although not all Engaged Learning initiatives offer incentives, students seem to respond more readily when they are offered, for instance with credits or paid internships. One of our recommendations would be to embed engagement into course programs to allow for a more fluid development of project-based learning within each discipline and within existing subjects.

When asked about challenges to working with students, CaST members replied:

- “Short time slots and full semester schedule; Balance between students' own responsibility and lecturers' teaching responsibility.”
- “Teaching the connection between academic content and practice. Students are usually so eager to jump into the latter, that they easily forget to use their learnings explicitly.”

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- "Students lack long time commitments to community partnerships. They are at a highly mobile time in their lives. Some student led initiatives are unsustainable."
- "It may request more effort than "traditional" teaching. Moreover, an effect of COVID was to reduce the propensity to cooperate in presence with other subjects."
- "Managing expectations and workload."

Engaged Learning is seen as being tied to learning, while seeking commitment to community partnerships. Being realistic about time seems to be a common thread to this experiential learning model.

The remaining challenge is a question for students: Where do theory and practice overlap? What is essential for Engaged Learning is that the theoretical underpinnings of the contents to be played out in an applied way. In this way, a greater focus should be given to issues rather than theory, and student engagement and class discussion are to be encouraged throughout any course. For example, my teacher trainees are more than willing to collect surveys and complete needs assessment and evaluation tasks. My English students are less interested in social responsibility as tied to their subjects believing that the applied part to language is comparative or linguistic analysis. "My" engineers would find most qualitative research disconnected from their studies unless it were specifically tied to a tangible product. Each of these groups would 'engage' in unique ways; and time, funding and the issues themselves will require a greater need for trans-disciplinarity within university courses.

Figure 5. Student presentations (Málaga, 2022)



We were fortunate to have student participation during the CaST multiplier event and it was clear to all partners that students should have a voice in

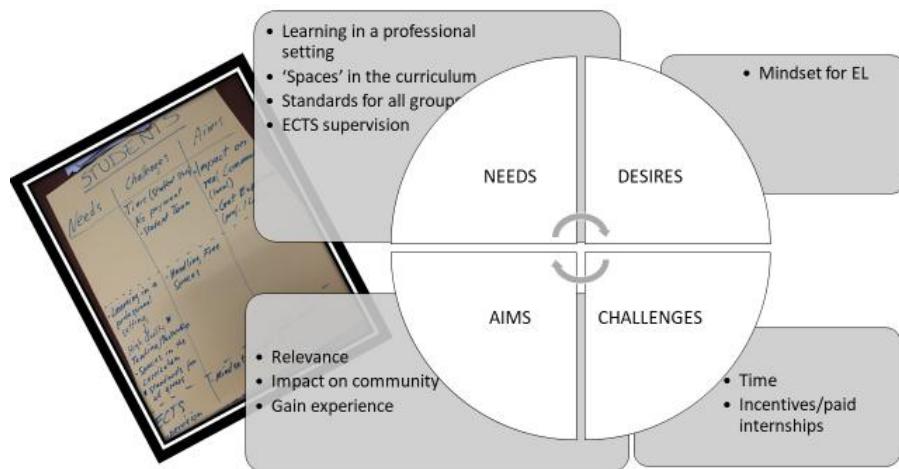
Engaged Learning initiatives (Figure 5). Several students gave presentations on what engagement meant to them and what benefits they received.

Students highlighted the experiential learning and social responsibility, but were not always able to make connections to theoretical underpinnings or to the academic context. One of the apparent limitations might actually be how faculty approach teaching from the prism of expertise, but not always with the practicality of real-world experience. Many teaching goals are discipline specific making the viability of Engaged Learning in pedagogy challenging outside the social sciences. We are, indeed, arguing that experiential learning and social responsibility should form part of every curriculum. Both the UK and Finland suggested that research was increasingly interdisciplinary while teaching largely remained discipline specific.

Could we find a solution in trans-disciplinary approaches? Indeed, what has been truly fascinating about the CaST project is how urban planners, criminologists, linguists, engineers, etc., all came together around the topic of engagement. Engaged Learning takes a global view of the problem to be solved by exploring multiple perspectives.

At the CaST multiplier event (2022), participants identified needs, aims, and challenges for students and Engaged Learning (Figure 6). Coinciding with other stakeholders, time and incentives were identified as challenges.

Figure 6. Workshop for students' perspectives (Málaga, 2022)



1.3 Trans-disciplinary approaches: Pedagogy and Research

How practical is it to seek out trans-disciplinary projects? The answer will vary according to each context. While there is movement towards cross curricular actions in higher education, there continue to be obstacles, lack of incentives and little real institutional support. There are no ‘one size fits all’ models.

- “In the Finnish context, {I} would say interdisciplinary research is fairly common, but interdisciplinary teaching much less common.”
- “In Spain, {I} would say that teaching and research are two separate things. Trans-disciplinary approaches vary in both teaching and research depending on the field of expertise.”

There is no clear consensus and perhaps it would be naive to insist that collaboration is without conflict. We will limit the debate to give testimony that supports collaboration as a positive factor, in particular when it is framed with facilitation in mind. Essentially, the secret to successful collaboration is the willingness to change and explore new ways to grow professionally, to examine new techniques in teaching as well as evidence-based practice.

1.3.1 Engaged Learning as a pedagogical approach

I will argue for increased trans-disciplinary approaches and an insertion of Engaged Learning initiatives directly into the curriculum. This is not without challenges, but the rewards are tangible. Engaged Learning is an extremely useful pedagogical approach. Engaged Learning entertains multiple approaches, but broadly speaking, effective Engaged Learning tackles straightforward challenges and can be discipline specific while larger, more complex problems require trans-disciplinary problem solving. One of the common points across the six partners has been the pedagogical strategy of project-based learning. The value of experiential learning is a clear benefit of Engaged Learning.

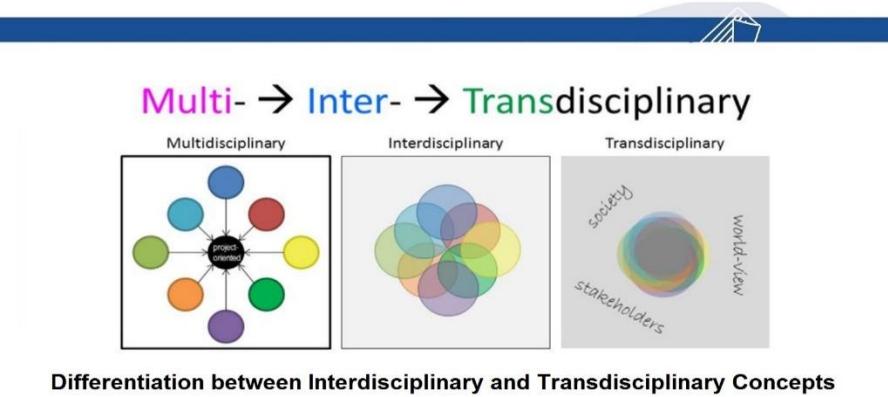
One way to foster Engaged Learning from within is with decided trans-disciplinary approaches. But again, not all universities find this is easily done. Although there has been some movement in this direction, most degrees seek specialisation, ahead of trans-disciplinary approaches. Many times, the curriculum is challenging to modify and is limited from a bureaucratic perspective. Speaking from the Spanish perspective, it is difficult to implement changes in standing curricula.

There are clear pedagogical implications to Engaged Learning. Learners are encouraged to understand the ‘why’ of learning through engagement, to see the ‘what’ of learning as contents are presented in different ways, and, to value the ‘how’ of learning with clear goals and ways to express knowledge. The universal design for learning clearly mentions engagement (Center for Applied Special Technology, 2018), but the term continues to be challenging to apply unless multiple disciplines combine. When asked about remaining challenges, one respondent replied:

- “Often, even intradisciplinary cooperation fails because camp thinking already prevails here: quantitative vs. qualitative research, theorists vs. empiricists, one school of thought against the other.”

We find it necessary to clarify the idea of disciplines and trans-disciplinarity by contrasting the term with multi and inter-disciplinary approaches to shed some light on the interpretation (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Across the Disciplines (Awan, 2022).



A multi-disciplinary example might be the health engineering degree. Engineers work with doctors, hospitals work with their patients, but each area is separate and comes together for specific projects for technology and medicine. The hard science disciplines are comfortable working with these constructs as they seem to have a final tangible product or service in mind. Each discipline remains 'intact' and complements the other (Griffith & de Haro, 2020). Research is seen as separate from the teaching learning models and the focus tends to be technological transfer.

An interdisciplinary example could be teaching content through English as a second language, there are communication skills to be considered as the content is delivered. The Social Sciences and the Humanities (the so-called soft science disciplines) are comfortable working with these combined formats. Integrated learning is a humanistic endeavour, sometimes overlapping with research and oftentimes not. The focus is often on knowledge transfer and is not always tangible.

The third term is trans-disciplinary. Trans-disciplinary approaches look outside the university and take a world view. This approach includes stakeholders from outside the institution and looks to societal needs. This is indeed where the true nature of Engaged Learning is revealed. There is a usefulness, a practicality a

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'mission' underlying Engaged Learning and the university can play a decisive role. For us, Engaged Learning is a way to bring the community directly into the university classroom, or better still move the classroom right into the community. Moving out of one's area of expertise is one of the most enriching experiences for continual learning.

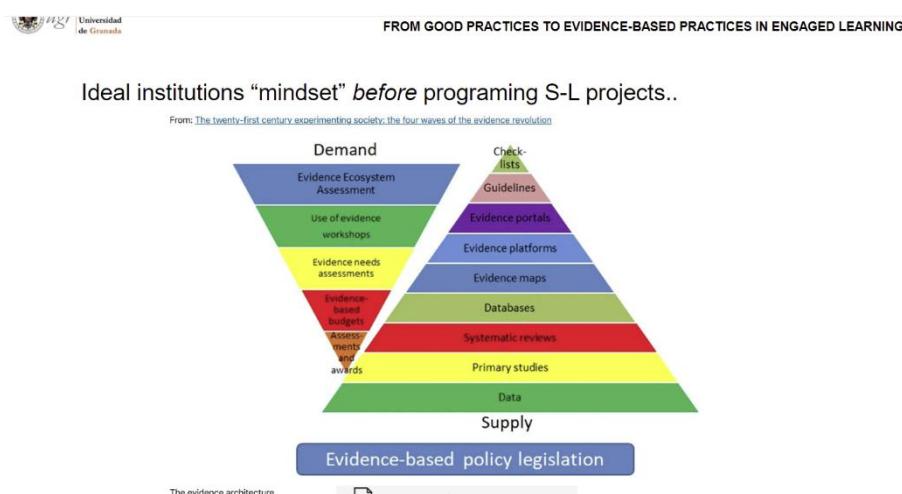
1.3.2 Engaged Learning as evidence-based practice

In addition to increased support for transdisciplinary teaching, I will also argue for evidence-based practice across the disciplines following the recommendations of Arco Tirado, 2022. At the CaST Multiplier event Arco Tirado (2022) presented his conference presentation 'From good practices to evidence-based practices in Engaged Learning'. He suggested that perhaps one of the shortcomings has been how to assess these service-learning initiatives and to move forward with new projects.

Any viable project should consider evidence-based practice to effectively document the impact of Engaged Learning. Engaged Learning widens the gaze for researchers and faculty to discuss the community, to discuss the relevance of research. So, not only are transdisciplinary projects to be encouraged from a pedagogical standpoint, they should also actively seek evidence support for their objectives.

At the CaST Multiplier event Arco Tirado (2022) suggested that before putting an initiative into place it is advisable to anticipate data collection and plan evaluation to demonstrate effectiveness in a systematic and credible way. In figure 8, he puts this into the context of the institution whereby data is turned into guidelines to effectively influence policies.

Figure 8. From Good Practices to Evidence Based Practice in Engaged Learning (Arco Tirado, 2022).



Clearly, challenges remain and one of the crucial pieces to Engaged Learning is to evidence the effectiveness of initiatives to ensure future funding. A 2018 article in the Times Higher Education (December 13 2018) claimed that academia currently values innovation at the expense of implementation, and that academic research output is only loosely related to social value. The article advocates for graduate programmes to prioritise training in community-based participatory research, which can make research more directly relevant, and provide a mechanism to address issues specific to under-served populations. Engaged learning, project-based learning or community-based knowledge exchange programmes can take many shapes or forms; and each one should actively aim to document effectiveness.

1.4 Discussion and remaining challenges

Broadly speaking, challenges will cover limitations and are grounded in reality. What is clear is that with a more institutional approach to Engaged Learning, trans-disciplinary initiatives could find their way into the curriculum. We have suggested that Engaged Learning is mutually beneficial, but at the same time, time-consuming and scarce on incentives. It is not without limitations, as partnerships do not always find the perfect 'fit'. The remaining challenges can be summed up as followed:

- Interdepartmental collaborations are 'messy' to establish and curricular changes over-bureaucratic.
- Funding is perpetually an 'issue.'
- Time.
- Engaged Learning as a research construct does not always work across the disciplines. There continue to be challenges to measuring knowledge transfer.
- Incentives for stakeholders are few and far between.

The key issues can be summed up as follows:

- Are there resources available for brokerage? Most HEI good intentions are tied into employability, sustainability and inclusion. Engaged Learning as a construct is oftentimes absorbed by other 'missions' within the HEI.
- Are professors supported in these 'tangents' from their curricular contents? Research is discipline specific and Engaged Learning is more suited to the trans-disciplinary benefits. Matching community interests and research will continue to be a challenge. There is little support for tangents from an institutional or professional standpoint for faculty.
- Do administrators and professors see eye to eye on Engaged Learning as a key curricular competence or does it get lost in employability, inclusion, or even 'sustainability' from an environmental standpoint? Initiatives seem

to move forward through the momentum provided by faculty stakeholders, or specific individuals.

- How tangible are the outputs? When discussing assessment, we are forced to define goals and measure with observable actions. Do we measure Engaged Learning as separate from project-based learning for students or as a mere aspect of a bigger goal for communities?
- How can we manage expectations? The ‘elephant in the room’ is time itself. University staff have time constraints when they start to move outside their departments, while maintaining teaching and research demands. Students have time constraints from their degrees and community partners have a completely different time perspective based on projects themselves and not on academic calendar.

1.5 Conclusions

As promoters of Engaged Learning, we must be aware of how to make it work in existing projects, seek out feasible community partners and be willing to forge new relationships within our HEI. One CaST member sums this up:

- “I think there is a lot of promise going forward, but there are a lot of key issues that need to be addressed first to make Engaged Learning more achievable and sustainable.”

The CaST project provided multiple examples of Enaged Learning in their pilot studies with the intention of discovering the potential for Engaged Learning initiatives within our HEIs. Some are embedded into existing courses and actively explore a student-centred approach, while others offer short term applications.

As we weigh the advantages of a top-down or of a bottom-up approach, successful Engaged Learning should never stray too far from its specific context. We tend to focus on students within the prism of our own subject, but ultimately Engaged Learning must be addressed from within the institution itself. Moving forward these key issues and ongoing challenges need addressing.

So, we conclude by stating that while Engaged Learning holds promise as a pedagogic approach, it continues to struggle with sustainable funding and ways to demonstrate effectiveness in a systematic and credible way. Engaged Learning goes hand in hand with managing expectations and improvising. Sometimes problems are only partially solved, but there have been mutual benefits. What is left to be done is part of the process moving forward, part of the process where good intentions are put into action.

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2 Institutionalisation of Engaged Learning

Lindsey Anderson¹, Sarah Dyer¹ and Joel Freedman²

University of Exeter¹; Freedman Design Services²

Abstract

This paper discusses the benefits and challenges of embedding Engaged Learning in the culture of universities. We look at the state of Engaged Learning across Europe and consider the benefits to universities, their students and their wider societies, of taking an institutionalised approach to Engaged Learning.

We also examine the lessons learned from the ten CaST pilot projects undertaken across the six partner universities, with a focus on the University of Exeter where a Community Engaged Learning Steering Group has been created to help create a culture of Engaged Learning within the University. The Steering Group, which comprises university academics and professional services staff, students and community partners, used Design Thinking to reflect on what has worked well, and what have been the challenges of the three Exeter CaST projects, as well as other forms of Community Engaged Learning at the University of Exeter. This process helped us look beyond the usual challenges related to funding and resources to consider what structural changes are necessary to support Engaged Learning in its broadest sense at the institutional level.

Finally, we look at the recommendations that emerged through the design thinking process and consider how this process can be replicated by other universities who wish to reflect on Engaged Learning in their own unique contexts.

Keywords: Engaged Learning, Community University Research Partnership, Science Shop, Institutionalisation

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Engaged Learning in Europe

Universities are seen as crucial agents of change, having the potential to address and help solve complex societal challenges. Community Engaged Learning is one of the ways universities are able to do this, offering significant benefits to society, the students and the institution. Engaged Learning provides students

with the opportunity to apply their learning to a context outside of the classroom, by addressing societal concerns, challenges or needs, while producing knowledge in an equitable, mutually beneficial partnership (Chmelka et al., 2020). Community-engaged learning can:

- further community partners' missions and goals by complementing their strengths and enhancing their resources;
- advance faculty's disciplinary research and teaching in ways that are rigorous, creative and invested in the common good; and
- prepare students to become lifelong learners and leaders with a public purpose who practice respect and empathy; seek collaboration, equity and creativity; and embrace differences and build belonging (Cornell University, n.d.).

Engaged Learning, supported to varying degrees by institutional structures, is being implemented in different forms in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) throughout the world. In its very simplest form, Engaged Learning can be undertaken on a voluntary basis. Some universities facilitate a matching process for students to undertake volunteering with a community partner - the students provide pro-bono services but are not rewarded financially or through the credit system for this. Embedding Engaged Learning in the curriculum overcomes the issues of reward and incentivisation. Credit bearing Engaged Learning modules can be optional or core modules with an embedded engaged component. Ideally, it would include some of the theory that underpins Engaged Learning pedagogy, as well as an element of reflection, and would allow students to work on a community-based a real-world societal challenge, such as evaluating a service or testing an idea.

While many universities have examples of Engaged Learning modules which span the curricula of different disciplines, others structure this more formally within units or departments. An example of a highly organised, cohesive approach to Engaged Learning is a Science Shop which provides independent, participatory research support in response to concerns experienced by civil society (Mulder et al., 2017). Science Shops aim to create equitable and supportive partnerships with the community partner and can help further the understanding of policymakers and the university of the research needs of civil society, while enhancing the transferable skills of the students (Living Knowledge Network, n.d.).

Science Shops are seen as exemplars of the brokering model in which interaction between universities and communities, meet at transaction zones to disseminate information and facilitate community projects and further experiential learning (Penfold & Goodman, 2011). Science Shops can serve as "social laboratories" for experiential learning where students can have direct contact with real-world complex issues and acquire knowledge integration skills and attitudes needed to address complex problems (Urias, 2020). They can also become multi-stakeholder co-learning platforms which enable students, researchers, policy

makers, citizens and other stakeholders to learn from each other and acquire and transfer relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes (Urias, 2020).

Regardless of the model and degree of organisation or institutionalisation, the extent to which community members are engaged in different stages of the research process can range from simply providing the research question at one end of the scale in more traditional research, to Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) at the other end, in which community members are involved at the levels of "input" (communities initiate research ideas and projects), "process" (communities remain intimately engaged throughout data collection, analysis, and interpretation phases), and "outcome" (communities play significant roles in "mobilizing the knowledge attained in CBPR projects for social change" (Urias, 2020).

The Communities and Students Together (CaST) Case Study Compendium – Engaged Learning in Europe (Marsh et al., 2021) - described the diversity of Engaged Learning policies within each of the six partner countries. We see that despite the emergence of Science Shops across parts of Northern Europe in the 1980s which refuelled the notion of universities being civic institutions, the adoption of community Engaged Learning by each of the CaST partner countries has been relatively slow, and overall, the practice in these countries remains fragmented (Chmelka, 2020). In Flanders in Belgium, for example, despite having a history of involvement in Science Shops, the Flanders Science Shop Network includes only two Flemish universities – the Free University of Brussels and University of Antwerp. Similarly, in the UK, few universities have developed formal models of brokering relationships between students and communities, despite the Science Shop at Queens University Belfast having been established for over 30 years.

Across Europe there is no systematic approach to Engaged Learning at the university level and strategic planning for sustainable Engaged Learning initiatives is limited. Indeed, the UK appears typical in that Engaged Learning mainly occurs in an ad-hoc manner and is much more embedded in some institutions than others. Recently however, a variety of top-down drivers have fostered and supported opportunities to embed community engagement into UK research, teaching, and learning strategies. These include the emergence of the 'civic university agenda,' and the Civic University Network the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) – as well as the availability of funding streams such as the Higher Education Innovation Fund⁵. Indeed, in 2020, a new Service Learning / Community Engaged Learning Network was established by a group of engaged academics and practitioners from several UK universities, paying testament to the increasing recognition of this pedagogy across UK HEIs.

2.1.2 Lessons from the CaST Pilot Projects

The Communities and Students Together (CaST) project brought together six European universities to share and build their understanding of Engaged

Learning (EL) and how this form of experiential learning could benefit students, the communities they engage with, as well as wider society. The partners brought with them a range of personal and institutional experience, but all had the desire to extend the knowledge base through a series of Engaged Learning pilot projects delivered across different disciplines, within varying contexts.

The ten pilot projects delivered in the six partner universities are described in detail in the project's third output – Piloting New Approaches to Engaged Learning in Europe (Anderson, 2022). The initiatives designed by each of the partners varied immensely, in terms of design, mode of delivery and discipline. While half of the CaST partners developed a single programme which was embedded within the curriculum, two partners (Exeter and Malaga) sought a broader approach which aimed to help understand the structural context that would support future Engaged Learning initiatives, and the sixth (Ghent) developed a course on how to embed an engaged approach into post-graduate teaching and research. While each of the curriculum-based courses were credit bearing, Exeter's initiatives were optional, non-curriculum-based projects where students were paid as interns for their involvement.

In most of the CaST initiatives, evaluation demonstrated that students benefitted from the opportunity to engage in and apply their learning to an external context. Students also gained useful transferable skills such as teamwork, leadership, enterprise and project management. The benefits for the community partners were not always as tangible - some of the project outputs included apps designed to benefit the external partners, while other partners benefitted from new insights, knowledge or increased visibility. Factors perceived to be linked to success included strong community-university relationships, the involvement of all project partners in the development of the initiative, expectations of all partners being explicitly defined from the outset, and the delivery of outputs which benefit all partners.

However, while the ten CaST pilot projects indicate that there are benefits to taking an engaged approach to learning for both students and community partners, stakeholders agree that more time and resources are required to develop them than traditional approaches to learning. Moreover, as stand-alone Engaged Learning initiatives, sustainability was seen to be a challenge for most of the pilot projects and at the end of the CaST project, the future of all initiatives was in doubt in the absence of additional funding, or broader institutional structures to support them.

The European Funded project SciShops recently analysed the impacts that 31 selected Science Shops had on their communities and the benefits they brought through their research delivered in response to civil society's research questions (SciShops, 2018). Concurring with findings from the CaST Case Studies Compendium Engaged Learning in Europe (Marsh et al., 2021), a major shortcoming common to most of the analysed projects was the absence of an impact evaluation. Nonetheless, SciShop reported several long-term impacts of these institutionalised structures, including: raised public awareness about

societal issues which can lead to local authorities taking action to resolve the identified problems; changes in public policy, legislation or in new community services; increased interest of academics and students in community-based participatory research and solving community concerns related to the environment increases; an increase in the level of community trust in research and interest in participating in the research process; and an increase in stakeholders' knowledge about the potential of university researchers solving environmental problems (SciShops, 2018).

So, could the CaST partner institutions, their students and the communities they serve, benefit from a more institutionalised approach to Engaged Learning? And if so, how can this be achieved?

2.2 Institutionalising Engaged Learning

2.2.1 The benefits of Institutionalisation

A 2011 literature review indicated that, despite an increased awareness of social responsiveness in Higher Education, the practices of engaged scholarship and community engagement need to become more entrenched into university curricula for universities and communities to recognise the necessity of integrating research, teaching, learning and civic engagement (Penfold & Goodman, 2011). Fundamentally, (and concurring with the findings of the CaST Pilot Projects), institutionalising Engaged Learning within higher education is considered to be beneficial, as sporadic efforts or one-off initiatives have limited value, if they are not supported by suitable institutional structures which have validation and authority (Tandon & Hall, 2015).

Describing a Community University Research Partnerships (CURP) as 'a joint research initiative between the university and the community, where both of them are equal partners and co-owners of the research process as well as the research output', Tandon and Hall define a CURP *structure* as an 'institutional mechanism aimed at advocating, facilitating, encouraging and supporting community engaged research partnerships (which are mutually beneficial) between academic scholars and community practitioners' (Tandon & Hall, 2015). The authors explain that by institutionalising research partnerships, we are able to formalise collaboration models and methodologies into the institutional arrangements of university procedures in a way which is mutually beneficial and accommodates the variations in knowledge systems in both universities and communities (Tandon & Hall, 2015).

Co-creation, co-production and co-generating of knowledge, policy and practice, are core principles central to the work of institutional support structures for CURP (Tandon & Hall, 2015). Therefore, institutionalisation reflects a systematic approach to CURP, and helps it gain visibility and recognition by researchers as a valid and legitimate approach to the co-creation and mobilization of knowledge (Tandon & Hall, 2015).

However, the traditional educational system mostly delivers linear, disciplinary progression and pedagogical strategies which focuses on narrow problem solving (Lake et al., 2016). More complex societal problems often involve high levels of uncertainty, undergo changes over time and require the coordination of a wide range of expertise (Snowden & Boone, 2007). Complex problems therefore benefit from a more collaborative, participatory approach to problem solving, involving multiple stakeholders during the different phases of the research project. By creating institutional structures which are more supportive of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches, we are therefore also nurturing a culture of co-creation and knowledge exchange, leaving our institutions better placed to address society's more complex, or wicked problems.

Urias et al recently proposed a conceptual framework to rethink science shops, in the light of recent policy imperatives and principles such as responsible research and innovation (RRI) (Urias et al, 2020). They note the importance of considering potential challenges that emerge when Science Shops position themselves at the “quadrant” of complex questions. These challenges include organisational and resource challenges, such as time and money; organisational policies and practices that may either facilitate or hinder these processes; and the need for organisational and epistemic cultures to change in order to recognise the value of this kind of approach as legitimate scientific research. They also acknowledge the challenges that community-based participatory research brings, such as how to reconcile power imbalances among participants and how to integrate their multiple (often conflicting) perspectives (Urias et al, 2020).

Since different kinds of knowledge, skills and competences are necessary to address those complex questions, and because in many of our institutions, our researchers and students are still trained within silos, this, in turn, brings challenges in terms of training staff, researchers, students and other stakeholders. It therefore goes without saying that better integration of transdisciplinary, community-engaged and participatory research and learning into the culture of our universities, would help foster skills in our students which empower them to take responsibility for the world’s wicked problems.

This in turn, would help an institution be more strategic in responding to local societal challenges (Urias et al, 2020). Indeed, having an entrenched, institutionalised culture of Engaged Learning, with dedicated resource and centralised systems can help an organisation mitigate against many of the challenges identified by Urias (above) and others. On a very practical level, it can help to:

- Facilitate interdisciplinarity, an essential ingredient for tackling complex societal issues.
- Rationalise resources, streamline systems, and help upskill staff and students

- Replicate (not duplicate) processes and practices, and support the transfer of lessons from one course to another.
- Build a community of practice which helps to build capacity of researchers and professional service staff with the expertise, enthusiasm and a shared knowledge base of good, engaged practice (e.g. understanding power sharing, and use of accessible language).
- Build and sustain long-term relationships with partners, developing trust and furthering opportunities for mutual benefit.
- Facilitate a coordinated, strategic approach to understanding and prioritising societal challenges.
- Be more agile and responsive to external stimuli and societal emergencies such as a global pandemic.

2.2.2 The process of Institutionalisation

Creating an embedded approach to Engaged Learning requires high level buy-in within the institution and dedicated cross-institutional staff members who support the prioritisation of external engagement in the institution's official and other key strategies (See NCCPE Edge Tool). However, it is possible (and advisable) to start small, and scale-up engaged learning activities, initially piloting an approach and refining processes as experience is gained and lessons learned (e.g. see Barisani, et al., 2020).

Tandon and Hall's 2015 "User's Manual" describes the Institutionalisation of Community University Research Partnerships (CURPs) (Tandon & Hall, 2015)^x. The manual provides practical guidance that will help deliver on policy commitments made to promote Community University Engagement and Research Partnerships in higher educational institutions. They classify the process into 3 phases:

Pre-institutionalisation phase: studying university /national/provincial policies favourable of CURP, consulting with both the community and university stakeholders and identifying funding instruments or other incentives.

Institutionalisation phase: involves operationalizing the structure, including governance, staffing, leadership, etc; clear demarcation of its functions; doing field work with communities; and monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes.

Post-institutionalisation phase: use of co-generated knowledge and sharing of good lessons and emerging best practices; scaling up the positive outcomes.

2.3 Rethinking Engaged Learning at the University of Exeter

The state of Engaged Learning in the University of Exeter could currently be described as "developing" or ad-hoc. While there is currently no formal

programme of Engaged Learning at the University of Exeter, research-inspired learning and teaching are central to the quality and enhancement of the learning opportunities offered at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels and there are increasing opportunities for students to participate in Engaged Learning on societally impactful projects through the curriculum. Students can also access a suite of schemes through the Career Zone, which enables them to engage with sector-specific training programmes and internships designed to provide them with the practical experience of working with external partners.

In 2020-21, as part of the CaST Project, the University of Exeter ran three Engaged Learning pilot projects which were chosen via a competitive process run by the Exeter Education Incubator, that sought innovative Engaged Learning initiatives. Hidden Exeter partnered with Exeter's oldest building, St Nicholas Priory, and offered an innovative skills-based learning opportunity for students, while creating a valuable new geo-located walking trail for the Priory; Students as Teachers was a collaboration between the University of Exeter's Language department and Rokeby Secondary School in East London and tested an innovative bi-directional method of teaching and learning multilingualism; and Kinder Exeter: Compassion Through Play was a week-long festival of activities and events which promoted compassion and well-being through acts of collaborative play. All three initiatives offered the opportunity for students to apply their skills and knowledge to an external context through co-design and creation.

As part of what could be considered as our pre-institutionalisation phase, a Community Engaged Learning Steering Group was convened to: 1) help steer the CaST Community Engaged Learning projects; 2) to help embed any lessons learned into future initiatives across the colleges; and 3) to help create a culture of Community Engaged Learning within the University of Exeter.

2.3.1 Using Design Thinking to understand requirements for change

The Community Engaged Learning Steering Group wanted to use the lessons learned from the three CaST Pilot projects to help reflect on the state of Engaged Learning at Exeter, and better understand what structural changes needed to be made to support a culture of Engaged Learning in our institution which would enable us to move forwards from an ad-hoc approach to a more embedded, institutionalised approach to this pedagogy.

2.3.1.1 Design Thinking workshop

A workshop was run by an independent facilitator, which brought together the three main stakeholder groups (academics, students, and community organisations) from the CaST projects and other Exeter Engaged Learning activities to take a design thinking approach to developing future recommendations.

The design thinking approach encourages reflection, discussion, and ideation, and uses a holistic multistakeholder approach to create strategies that are based on a robust understanding of the experiences of those involved (Cross, 2011). Design thinking is an iterative process in which you seek to understand your users, challenge assumptions, redefine problems and create innovative solutions which you can prototype and test. The overall goal is to identify alternative strategies and solutions that are not instantly apparent with your initial level of understanding.

The workshop aimed to:

- Celebrate the successes and positives of Engaged Learning at Exeter and ensure success factors are maintained.
- Look beyond the challenges singularly related to project funding and available time and resources.
- Develop a set of recommendations that are suitable for:
 - Academics looking to develop new project proposal.
 - Students who may take part in projects in the future
 - Community groups who want to be partners of future projects.
 - Managers/Administrators with an ambition to run future programmes of work.
- Create recommendations with a timescale from 6 months up to 2 years
- Identify who should take charge of recommendations and how they might be carried out.
- Align recommendations with University of Exeter strategy themes of Place and Partnership.

Due to the changing nature of the social distancing guidelines at the time due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the workshop was run online. It was facilitated by a consultant who was independent of the university, using a combination of Zoom for webinar capability, and Miro as a virtual whiteboard.

Each of the stakeholder groups brought different perspectives, priorities, and experiences to the process, and it was key to ensure that each group was receptive to, and able to appreciate the perspectives, priorities, and experiences, of the other groups. An environment was therefore created within the workshop to support open and honest discussion which would surface both positive and negative reflections from all participants. Initially this was done in collective groups of stakeholders (all students together, all academics together, all community groups together), followed by an opportunity for discussion in mixed stakeholder groups to ensure all reflections were understood.

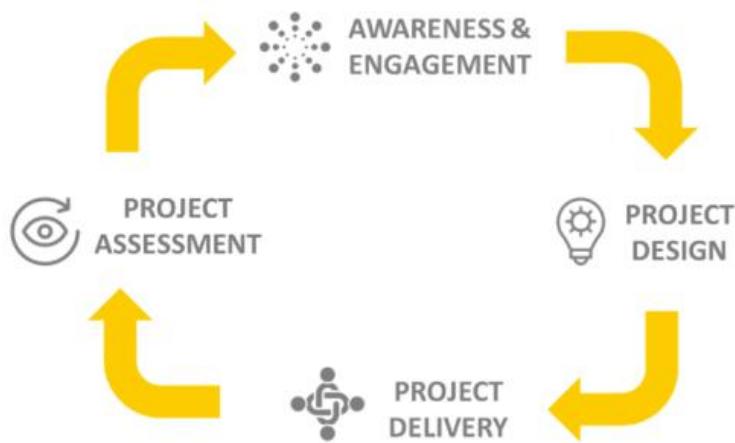
Following the surfacing of challenges faced by different stakeholders, participants in mixed groups explored and discussed the underlying reasons

behind challenges, as well as the impacts that they had. Participants were then reformed back into stakeholder-specific groups and were encouraged to generate recommendations. Finally, these recommendations were shared and discussed across the wider workshop group, before being synthesised into clusters in order to identify themes.

2.3.1.2 Recommendations

In order to contextualise the synthesised recommendations, it can be useful to view them as being relevant to different parts of the Engaged Learning project cycle (Figure 6.1).

Figure 2.1. Project Cycle.



Across the Engaged Learning project cycle the workshop outputs broadly recommended:

Awareness & Engagement:

- Comprehensive mapping of Engaged Learning activities across the university to create a unified approach and single source of information to inform people about Engaged Learning opportunities at Exeter.
- Create a unified brand around Engaged Learning activities along with a joined up institutional strategy.
- Create a clear communication route to students and community groups that demonstrates the type and breadth of opportunities available

- Create a mechanism for introducing organisations to the various opportunities and connecting students to these, with dedicated brokerage resources.
- Build a framework for relationships between the university and organisations with specific projects to build more sustainable and productive partnerships that could be embedded into courses.

Project Design

- Give time and space for students to work with organisations and community members in order to design the projects and programmes and then consider module accreditation.
- Consider the creation of projects that bring together students from across different courses as well as working with a range of community stakeholders.
- A city centre space for bringing people together where organisations can promote themselves, relationships can be formed, and experimentation outside of academic assessment can occur.
- Consider student and partner schedules to create accessible projects that avoid diary conflicts and link to assessment points.
- Consider relay projects where students can continue each others' work.
- Ensure the time required by organisations and students is acknowledged and recognised. Be clear about support that will be given by the university versus that expected from the organisation.

Project Delivery:

- Create a range of student engagement levels which may relate to availability, or taster sessions that lead into projects in subsequent years. Over a longer time period this may lead to better skills development across a degree.
- Offer training sessions to support development of project specific skills along with sessions on transferable skills such as design thinking and problem solving.
- Regular meetings along with an evaluation framework that gives all partners (including community members) a chance to feedback. Clear route for action if project / relationship goes awry.
- Create resources that can be shared and used across multiple years with insights regularly updated. This could be part of an induction pack including handbooks, recordings, and other materials.
- Consider mechanisms that provide incentives for students to stay involved in projects (such as link to assessments). Set up systems and documents to ensure continuity in the event of personnel changes.

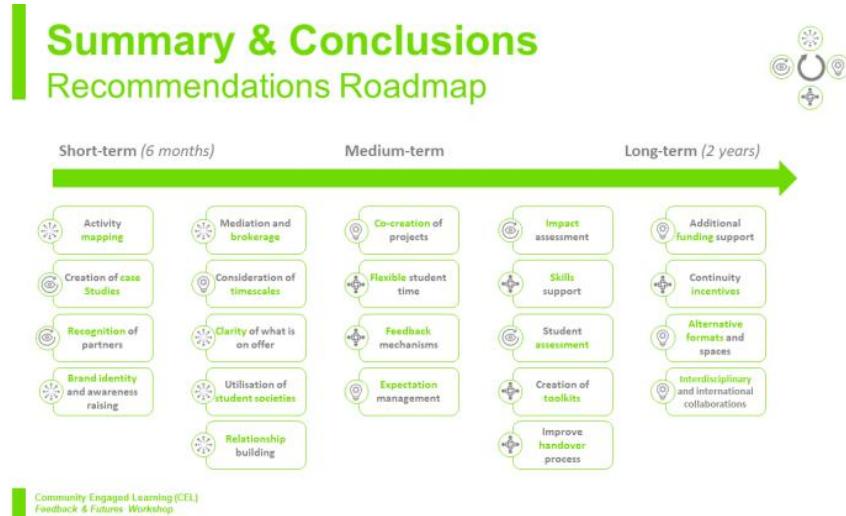
- Create a means by which learning can be transferred between different groups of students. Encourage students to share meaningful experiences as part of long-term relationships with organisations.

Project Assessment:

- Analyse what has been learned and achieved. Consider how these link to university Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).
- Consider different models for module accreditation that are linked to impact achieved through projects. Could different engagement across different years of a course relate to different credit levels?
- Create research promotion pathways as a means of incentivising engagement from academic community.
- Create case studies that showcase good practice and create a legacy platform for Engaged Learning projects. These can be used to publicise opportunities more widely and encourage participation.
- Consider ways in which community partners can be recognised and rewarded for activities carried out in partnership with the university in order to incentivise future collaboration.

A Recommendations Roadmap was then created which prioritised the suggested steps along a two-year timeline (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2. Recommendation Roadmap.



2.4 Final Reflections

This process and reflection have come at a time when the University of Exeter is refreshing its overarching strategy and undergoing structural change to align more closely with the vision to build on a strong interdisciplinary culture to:

- Lead meaningful action against the climate emergency and ecological crisis
- Make key breakthroughs to transform human health and wellbeing
- Lead the progress towards creating a fair, socially just and inclusive society.

The University has also recently developed a Civic University Agreement (University of Exeter, n.d.) which aims to help create more strategic collaborations with other anchor institutions in Exeter to help address the societal and sustainability challenges of the city. The time therefore feels right to expedite a cross-institutional culture change which to date has been advancing in isolation within silos across the University.

There is clearly appetite within and outside the academy for more Engaged Learning opportunities for Exeter's students. However, it is clear that structural changes, supported at the highest level, need to be made before the benefits exceed the efforts required to deliver a meaningful and mutually beneficial experience for students and their community partners. The design thinking process has helped us work with our partners to reflect on what works well and what needs to change to embed a culture of Engaged Learning across the institution.

Interestingly, the recommendations that emerged from the process at Exeter align well with the steps described by McKenna for getting a Science Shop off the ground (see Barisani et al., 2020). However, it is important for each HEI to understand and work with its own unique internal and external context. An effective support structure can clearly play a crucial role in instituting policies and programmes, which can help deepen, broaden, improve and sustain Engaged Learning partnerships. It can also help to streamline Engaged Learning within regular academic discourse, promote the growth of knowledge by collaboration, and build collaborative networks (Tandon & Hall, 2015). Therefore, investing in infrastructure and processes which nurture and support partnerships and transdisciplinary Engaged Learning, can maximise the benefits for all stakeholders. Design thinking is a useful methodology which can help institutions to reflect upon their own distinctive position and context and create a roadmap which supports the implementation of structures and mechanisms to help them on their own Engaged Learning journey.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the students, staff and community partners who participated in the three CaST pilot projects undertaken at the University of Exeter: Hidden Exeter, Kinder Exeter: Compassion through Play; and Students as Teachers. We would also like to thank Dr Tom Ritchie who supported the three CaST projects. Finally, we would like to thank members of the Community Engaged Learning Steering Group and all those who attended the Design Thinking Workshop which has helped shape the future of Engaged Learning at the University of Exeter.

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3 Engaged Learning and the Early Career Researcher: How Do They Find Their Place in an Undefined Terrain

Courtney Marsh, Noel Klima

Ghent University

Abstract

We aim to push forward the agenda of the University as a part of an ecosystem of knowledge production addressing public problem-solving. With this framework in mind, addressing the concept of Engaged Learning at an early stage (such as the PhD level) has been thought most prudent in pushing forward this agenda. Though of course not every PhD researcher will go on to work in university or teaching roles, most of those who do enter those roles have completed a PhD. If given the tools before teaching even begins, it becomes easier to implement them into course material rather than re-working courses that were never envisioned to have such elements. Further, those who do not take up roles within academia may very well end up in positions where they can broker the role of Engaged Learning from the community perspective, which is equally necessary in this equation and has the potential to further spread the impact of Engaged Learning across Belgium and beyond. Our results will include reflections on the students' expectations prior to the seminars and their evaluations thereafter. We have found that students desire to have more awareness of and connections with local communities in their research. While this is a good starting basis, there is still a need for more sustainable trainings in the future.

Keywords: Engaged Learning, PhD training, innovation, early career researchers, societal impact.

3.1 Introduction

At a time when universities are becoming more aware of their role when it comes to societal impact, new forms of learning with and for society are gaining popularity globally. Engaged Learning is one form of this learning and can be defined as interaction between the teacher, student, and the community to connect the learning content and context to real life societal challenges and environments. In some universities, as in at Ghent University, Engaged Learning

is in some cases applied through the Community Service Learning (CSL) methodology.

Engaged Learning took shape at Ghent University with CSL as part of the University's Strategic Plan (2012-2016) and later in a European project (2015-2017, Europe Engage – Developing a Culture of Civic Engagement through Service-Learning within Higher Education in Europe [Reference 2014-1-ES01-KA203-004798]). The latter is a three-year project funded by the European Union with the purpose of identifying existing service-learning practice, promoting service-learning as a pedagogical approach, and creating a network in this region, where a lot remains to be done in terms of civic engagement and service-learning. CSL in Ghent University is defined as "an experience-oriented form of education in which students within a course acquire academic competences and learning content, which they apply in a social context (community) and in which they make a social commitment, about which they reflect critically" (Cress, 2005; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Furco, 1996; Jacoby, 1996).

This definition includes internships, projects, master's theses, and seminars as an integrated component of the module. However, while these are forms of Engaged Learning, typically these types of approaches have a restricted means of reciprocity when considering the limited active community involvement in the learning process, thus contributing to the ambiguity of Engaged Learning at a higher level in Flemish universities. Ghent University began a project for developing Engaged Learning initiatives at a university level, which resulted in an inventory of CSL-courses within Ghent University, as well as an online tool for lecturers. However, following the project's limited duration the CSL unit has been spread out among various areas within the University. In the interim, individual faculties and/or departments were expected to continue the initiatives of their own volition, and while this was done by some faculties, the practice is still very fragmented and not every faculty has offerings that include CSL.

Because of this fragmentation, there are undoubtedly Engaged Learning courses that exist within the University but that are not known to the CSL unit. The CaST project has demonstrated that this is not an isolated case in just Ghent University, but rather a widespread phenomenon across European universities. This considered, Ghent University has space dedicated to this type of learning on their website with key definitions and guidelines for how to implement such a course and further guidance is given within the Ghent University intranet. The guidelines provided give three main components, consisting of factors involving academic, practical, and reflective sections. There is also mention of reciprocity between the University and the community, which aligns with the CaST definition of Engaged Learning.

However, while there are some resources available through the Ghent University website, these are largely restricted to those within the University, so for community partners not already affiliated with the University, only limited information is available. This limitation makes training early career researchers in how to implement Engaged Learning practices into their work, and

potentially bringing their knowledge to the community sector should they not continue in an academic role, even more important to future community-university brokerage.

In a broader context, funding is one aspect of Engaged Learning that is an important, yet widely varied, factor. As highlighted in our research during the CaST project, Engaged Learning, when officially recognised, is done on a mostly ad hoc basis within universities, and varies even more when looked at from a country level perspective (Marsh et al., 2021). Certainly, within the EU there is no systematic approach to Engaged Learning at the Higher Education Institution (HEI) level. Though these initiatives take a lot of personal dedication and commitment to see them through to completion, they cannot be sustained without funding, and this is a serious issue many HEIs face. Strategic planning for how to plan successful and sustainable Engaged Learning initiatives with tight budgets is an important consideration that perhaps HEIs could, or should, be more involved with. Another advantage of training early career researchers is in the skills necessary already being acquired, thus making strategy and planning more streamlined and potentially lessening, if only slightly, the financial burden of Engaged Learning initiatives.

Perhaps one of the biggest lessons learned from our previous research on Engaged Learning is that without the dedication of the staff involved, there simply would be no initiatives to speak of (Marsh et al., 2021, Marsh & Klima, 2022). Of course, there are other essential pieces, but the dedication of the staff involved is incredibly important. This considered, one of the issues evident in our prior research is the lack of incentives or rewards given to the staff involved with the initiatives from the University or otherwise. The benefits to both the students and community have been demonstrated very clearly, but the benefits to the staff are less clear. Of course, the potential for publication and personal fulfilment of undertaking such a task should be considered, but this is on a personal level rather than an institutional one. This then begs the question, is this enough? Is intense and time-consuming personal dedication enough to sustain Engaged Learning initiatives? In HEIs one could consider valuing Engaged Learning and societal impact on the community as evaluation criteria among others or install special dedicated funds for such initiatives.

With this in mind, teaching these skills to early career researchers provides (the seniors and leaders from tomorrow) more opportunity for such practices to evolve and thrive in university settings. We took the approach at Ghent University to take a step back from the creation of a new Engaged Learning initiative to focus on how to amplify the skills and knowledge necessary for others to create Engaged Learning initiatives. Rather than create an Engaged Learning course, we created a series of seminars, in partnership with the Ghent University Doctoral Schools, to teach (and inspire) early career researchers “how to” create an Engaged Learning initiative within their own disciplines. The aim was thus to create a sustainable future multidisciplinary network of potential educators and community partners who have both the theoretical and practical

knowledge necessary to establish their own Engaged Learning initiatives and act as brokers among partners in future endeavours.

"An Introduction to Engaged Learning for PhD Students" was a series of three, two-hour seminars led by a multidisciplinary team of academics and community partners supported by the University. Led by academics from two faculties, a representative from the Department of Educational Policy at Ghent University, and a representative from the City of Ghent, this seminar series was attended (online due to Covid-19) by 13 learners from eight faculties and 12 departments (including the arts, humanities, and social sciences (SSHA) and the science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM) disciplines). This included learners from different levels of education (PhD, Postdoctoral, and Knowledge Brokers) and experience (years 1-4 in PhD and multiple year tenure at universities in an academic capacity). The seminars covered Engaged Learning from three perspectives: the University, the curriculum, and the community to cover and connect the different settings.

The initiative created for the CaST Pilot Project was a new approach, though it is closely connected with the University's goals and the training already offered. However, this initiative differed in its intended audience and immediate outcomes. As outlined in more detail below, the goal of this initiative was to create long-lasting knowledge in how to implement Engaged Learning elements into course work on a multidisciplinary level starting with the early career researcher, or PhD researcher. Thus, "An Introduction to Engaged Learning for PhD Students" was created.

3.2 Approach

We have previously defined Engaged Learning as the process where students apply the theory learned at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to a context outside of the HEI by addressing societal concerns, challenges, or needs while producing knowledge in an equitable and mutually beneficial partnership (Chmelka et al., 2020). A large emphasis of our project has been on the concept of reciprocity, whereby the community not only receives a service from those in HEIs, but is also actively involved, engaged, and contributes to the overall learning process. This, in addition to the benefits students receive, results in students and community partners co-producing knowledge for mutual benefit and to address and/or provide solutions to societal challenges. We aim to push forward the agenda of the University as a part of an ecosystem of knowledge production addressing public problem solving.

With this framework in mind, addressing the concept of Engaged Learning at an early stage (i.e., the PhD level) has been thought the most effective way of developing this. Though of course not every PhD researcher will go on to work in academic roles, most of those who do enter academia have completed a PhD. Providing them with the tools before they begin to teach, can help to implement them into course material rather than re-working courses that were never

envisioned to have such elements. Further, those who do not take up roles within academia may end up in positions where they can broker the role of Engaged Learning from the community perspective, which is often under addressed, in this equation.

The seminars delivered were spread among three general topics and given by an interdisciplinary team with expertise in the particular area. The three perspectives were: university level, curriculum level, and community level. The overarching idea was to cover all aspects of an Engaged Learning initiative within an HEI environment. Beginning with how Engaged Learning works within a university context and the infrastructures available to those who want to implement Engaged Learning elements into their teachings (at least at Ghent University), the following seminar then looked at the other factor of Engaged Learning within the HEI, the curriculum. This session covered various approaches that have been taken in other Engaged Learning initiatives (mostly sourced from previous CaST examples described in the State-of-the-Art Report (Chmelka et al., 2020) and Case Studies Compendium (Marsh et al., 2021) as well as the practical elements of what is needed to create (and sustain) a successful Engaged Learning course, as exemplified in the Human Rights and Migration Law Clinic at Ghent University. The final session stepped outside of the direct HEI context and looked at community partnership and interaction. For this session an employee from the City of Ghent was involved with the delivery of the content and discussed how the community and universities can co-exist and form mutual partnerships within the context of Engaged Learning. Though each component was equally important, the amalgamation of all sessions was considered necessary for optimal understanding of our goals, and Engaged Learning overall, and so participation in all three sessions was mandatory to receive credit; though not all participants chose to attend all sessions.

3.2.1 Introducing Engaged Learning Theory to the Ghent University Early Career Researcher Community

“An Introduction to Engaged Learning for PhD Students” was a course created by the Ghent University team and approved by the Ghent University Doctoral Schools as an official course offered within the University. The Doctoral Schools within Ghent University offer doctoral training and career support programmes to PhD students to fulfil their credit requirements for their degrees. Though this course was credit bearing, it was only targeted at PhD students and was optional; the maximum number of students allowed to enrol was 15. However, it was possible for postdoctoral students and other Ghent University employees to attend without obtaining credits, and we had two participants in this category. To be officially recognised by the Doctoral Schools, an application must be submitted to a reviewing committee justifying the need to undertake the proposed course and the indicative course content. This course was accepted by the Doctoral Schools under the course heading “Transferable Skills Seminars” within the “Research and Valorisation” cluster. The series consisted of three, two-hour seminars led by academics from two faculties, a representative from

the Department of Educational Policy at Ghent University, and a representative from the City of Ghent.

Each session was taught by a lecturer from a different discipline along with guest speakers from more varied backgrounds, drawing on experiences from their own work, further enhancing the interdisciplinarity of the content. The content of the course was taught at such a level that the skills gained can be applied to other disciplines. Our goals for Engaged Learning have always been to be inclusive and encompassing. As such, creating a course that was inter- and transdisciplinary in nature was vital so that the ideas and concepts could spread beyond our initial audience in a meaningful way and can actually make an impact. In addition, community representatives were invited to complement the academic side of the topic by providing insights on the “dos” and “don’ts” in academic-practice cooperation from their perspective and experiences.

As Engaged Learning as a practice is focused on reciprocity (among the University, students, and involved communities), the seminars were created to follow this structure. While the lecturers were chosen because they hold expertise in the area presented, the overarching goal was mutual partnership and learning. It was foreseen that each two-hour session would consist of a more traditional one-and-a-half-hour presentation to introduce the topic of the session from both theoretical and practical perspectives followed by an interactive thirty-minute session pitching ideas of how to implement the theoretical knowledge into different course structures and/or disciplines. The interaction was meant to activate reflection among the students and connect the learning content to their own contexts and specific topics. In practice, this was not the structure each seminar followed, but part of Engaged Learning is flexibility, and this was encouraged in our own seminars.

The approach of this course was primarily from a metatheoretical level. The main objective was to give the participating students the theory behind the practice that could be applied to their own disciplines and fields of study, thus contributing to the overall applicability to being interdisciplinary in nature. Following this was the practical implementation of Engaged Learning into (apart from the first session) a specific context and/or discipline. This included the Ghent University Law Clinics for Session Two and community work with troubled youths in Session Three. However, it was stressed that though these examples were rather context specific, the general principles could be applied within other disciplines. This further emphasised the multidisciplinary nature of both the seminars given and Engaged Learning overall.

A further goal of this initiative was to support the application of the knowledge gained by the students to roles outside of the University. Engaged Learning is based on three pillars: university, students, and community. However, often the third pillar, is given less weight in the overall equation. Universities have been described as inaccessible, or locked behind the ivory towers, to those who are not currently on the “inside” (i.e., (potential) community partners). The role of university-community brokerage is vitally important, but, in some cases,

undervalued, making community partnership more difficult. If given these skills as an early career researcher, the potential to take these skills to a non-academic role post-PhD (or after a career switch) expands the potential for community partners to have the knowledge, and therefore “skill” set necessary to interact with universities and create more engaged learning initiatives that are truly mutual in partnership and benefits.

3.2.2 Who was involved?

In addition to the seminar leaders profiled above, this seminar series was attended (online) by thirteen learners from eight faculties and 12 departments (see table 3.1 below). This included learners from different levels of education (PhD, Postdoc, Knowledge Brokers) and a range of years (years 1-4 of the PhD and multiple year tenure at universities in an academic capacity).

Table 3.1. Profile of Participants

<i>Student Number</i>	<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Position – Number of years in position</i>
1	Architecture	PhD – Unknown
2	Economics	PhD – 1
3	Marketing Innovation and Organisation	PhD – 1
4	Conflict and Development Studies	PhD – 3
5	Social Work and Social Pedagogy	Consortium Coordinator – 9
6	Medicine	PhD – 4
7	Language and Culture	PhD – 3
8	Psychoanalysis and Consultation Psychology	PhD – 2
9	Engineering	PhD – Unknown
10	Business and Public Management	PhD – 1
11	Criminology and Law	Postdoc – 7
12	Public Health and Primary Care	PhD – 3
13	Engineering	PhD – Unknown

3.3 Goals of the Initiative

The Engaged Learning initiative developed for the Pilot Project by Ghent University was not standard in its development, and thus, it is also not standard in its outcomes. Many of the Engaged Learning initiatives have a more or less directly observable output(s); however, our initiative was developed with long-term goals in mind. Our goal was to introduce the concepts and theoretical underpinnings behind Engaged Learning in the University context, specifically reaching an under-targeted group (PhD students). Because of this, the immediate impact upon completion of the initiative was only in the attendance of the course; 13 out of the 15 registered students attended at least one of the seminars.

Our initial goals for this initiative were modest, and there was a concerted focus on understanding the needs of the participants and how best to deliver our message effectively in a multidisciplinary environment while our staff, though still from various disciplines, was still limited – primarily within the social sciences. The initial feedback suggested we met our goals in this regard.

We attempted a follow up survey of those in attendance one year after the initial seminars took place, but there was very little returned feedback. There are many potential reasons for the low response rate (i.e., students are no longer at Ghent University, and thus not checking their Ghent University emails; too long between initial course and follow up; feedback was asked for during the end of term, a typically busy period; etc.). However, it is possible that the lack of responses are responses in themselves. Though we received positive reviews, in the immediate post-seminar survey, on the applicability of our material to different fields of research, when Engaged Learning is presented at such an abstract level, it is difficult to create true engagement beyond the training course. Despite our inclusion of examples of concrete initiatives with each theoretical approach, without a specific Engaged Learning initiative in mind for each participant, our work, regardless of our best efforts, remains abstract, and thus, hard to follow through with. Perhaps, beyond our seminar, there has been little incentive given to PhDs to implement this type of work into their own research and so they had nothing to update us with in this regard. Though, it should be noted, this is purely speculation based on findings from the previous CaST outputs about lack of incentives for Engaged Learning initiatives.

We anticipate that the long-term output(s) of the initiative will be seen in the involvement of those who attended our seminars in their future career paths, both academic and non-academic. Naturally because of this extended timeline, the immediate outputs are limited to the dissemination of our seminar to the Ghent University PhD (and ultimately post-doctoral and staff) community, which was successful and proceeded as planned.

3.4 Discussion

It was always envisioned that this initiative would continue beyond the scope of the CaST project as an addition to the courses offered through the Ghent University Doctoral Schools. However, based on the feedback obtained from the pilot, there will undoubtedly be changes made to the seminars. This considered, the topics of the seminar, beyond the scope of Engaged Learning from the three perspectives (university, curriculum, and community), were also envisioned to change even prior to the first pilots. The guiding concept was to alternate the examples given in each of the seminars with those which come from different disciplines. This would make the seminars as multi-disciplinary as possible and keep the content fresh and updated with current examples of Engaged Learning within our university and community.

Based on the evaluations from the participants it is likely the seminars will be expanded in length, as many considered two hours per session to be too short; 15% said the contact hours were too low and one specifically commented that "each session is a bit too short for discussion". Ideally in future this course will also be held in person, and thus increase the opportunity for discussion and collaboration within each of the seminars. With this increased collaboration it also intended to increase the capacity of the course beyond 15. However, the number of participants will remain limited so that collaboration is not limited by staff numbers for each seminar.

In terms of the initiative being expanded elsewhere, the idea of offering the course to PhD students outside of the University was originally discussed (in the planning phase of the pilots), but for the pilot it was thought best to keep the test case small. However, in future this course could easily be extended as an offer to participants from other universities and/or community members. How this would work in terms of course credits would of course have to be re-evaluated should such an eventuality materialise, but there are options already foreseen (i.e., exchanges with participating HEIs or research stays with HEIs who are interested in expanding their Engaged Learning reach).

The first conception of this course was largely based on personal connections the Ghent University CaST project members had already established prior to the pilot projects. While this is an obvious asset in this rendition of the course, a more concrete network would need to be connected within the Ghent University community, and the Ghent community in general, for this to be sustainable in future. As with Engaged Learning, the course is intended to be flexible and adaptable with each iteration, which should make the sustainability of the course more achievable and allow this course to continue as part of the Ghent University Doctoral Schools, even if offered to students outside of the Ghent University community. There is a drive within Ghent University to increase societal impact and social awareness, so a programme such as ours was a welcome addition to the Doctoral Schools' portfolio.

3.5 Conclusions /Recommendations

There are many conclusions to be drawn from our time during the CaST project. The fragmentation of Engaged Learning across not just our own university, but on a pan European level, and perhaps also on a global level, has contributed to a lack of recognition of what Engaged Learning is, and from this, what Engaged Learning can accomplish. This anthology is our attempt to answer these questions. Often when discussing this research to an unfamiliar audience, the first question is, "What is Engaged Learning?" However, when the core components are discussed, it is quickly realised not only what Engaged Learning is, but that some initiatives are already occurring without being labelled as such. The spread of the consistent terminology is, we believe, vital in enhancing awareness of Engaged Learning and encouraging implementation into more courses and community programmes and what this anthology aims, in part, to do. In an increasingly divided world, building bridges between academic and community partners is now more important than ever.

Perhaps what resonated most profoundly within the context of our work was discussed in our third and final seminar of our pilot initiatives, "nothing about us, without us, is for us" (Charlton, 1998). The idea that building relationships leads to co-creation was cemented as a core component of our Engaged Learning priorities here at Ghent University. Further, communication with participants is one of the most important aspects of the entire process. Most particularly, communication is vital to the success of an Engaged Learning initiative as people in groups can have different ideas of what matters, thus impacting how an initiative will go forward, if at all. Similarly, Engaged Learning is difficult to implement because not everyone who is involved has the same drive for co-creation. As discussed in a previous CaST publication, Engaged Learning in Europe (Marsh et al., 2021), this need for personal commitment is not only desired, but also required for an Engaged Learning initiative to begin and be sustainable in the University setting.

The initiative at Ghent University has proven this concept to be true; however, it has also shown that even personal commitment can only take an initiative so far. As such, sustainability of Engaged Learning initiatives is still a work in progress for us at Ghent University, specifically within our own Faculty of Law and Criminology. The course we created for the pilot of the CaST project is very much intended to continue into the future; however, with limited resources, planning this has been stagnated thus far. The only way forward for this course is from personal commitment from those already involved. Engaged Learning has so much potential to impact entire communities for the better, yet so little direct motivation to initiate and continue outside of a genuine desire to see it forward. It is hard to conclude what should be done in this regard because, as we've seen throughout previous publications, approaches to Engaged Learning vary so greatly by country. Nonetheless, we do recommend every student have the opportunity to take such a course, and further, every teacher have at least some kind of engagement with such a course to see its potential. A perfect

Engaged Learning initiative does not exist, but it's the process that provides original insights and meaningful change in communities, and that should be the goal.

Acknowledgements

This Anthology would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of our core consortium of CaST partners. We would also like to thank those from our own Ghent University team for their contributions: Alexis Dewaele, Kris Rutten, Ann Buysse, and Tom Vander Beken, as well as those from Ghent University and the Ghent community who contributed to the project outputs: the Ghent University Doctoral Schools, Leen Van Gijsel, Saila Ouald-Chaib, Ellen Desmet, Diete Glas, Herman Wolf, and Tom Decorte. Of course, we also have an immense gratitude toward the students who were willing to participate and help shape our Engaged Learning trainings at Ghent University.

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4 Headstand Stories: Engaged Learning Local Pioneers' Perspectives

Alexander Chmelka

Otto-von-Guericke-Universität Magdeburg, Germany

Abstract

The article briefly introduces the so-called handstand method from the field of systemic counselling and then applies it to an Engaged Learning seminar and workshop that took place as part of an Engaged Learning initiative. Findings derived from this mainly relate to the identified problem of the lack of implementation of practice projects in Engaged Learning formats. The consideration of the seminar particularly reveals deficiencies in the teaching methods and conditions and offers advice on how to remedy them. In the case of the workshop, the initial focus is on identifying and prioritising complex problems of a group of students and their teacher which negatively affect the strategic development of the Engaged Learning initiative. The process of a Lightning Decision Jam is described to show how the group develops action steps that can be implemented to solve the problem. In conclusion, the findings from the two case studies are discussed and potential research desiderata are formulated. This is accompanied by the attempt to harmonise Engaged Learning with the existing corpus of academic knowledge production.

Keywords: headstand method, reversed brainstorming, Lightning Decision Jam, Engaged Learning

4.1 Introduction

Failure is not the opposite of success. It is a part of it.

Because Engaged Learning initiatives are so diverse and context-specific, there is no one-size-fits-all recipe for the success of new initiatives. Despite shared good practice and lessons learned, trial and error remain an integral part of risky Engaged Learning ventures. Yet potential Engaged Learning pioneers can not only learn a few things for their own practice from the mistakes of others, but also find comfort in the fact that others before them have also suffered setbacks and still found ways to continue or start anew.

The article uses the so-called headstand method, which has been used in the field of systemic coaching and collegial case consultation for some time. It

involves telling real stories of failure or creating fictional scenarios to show how NOT to do Engaged Learning. This is not only great fun and serves as a sometimes-humorous self-reflection on one's own shortcomings and mistakes, but also always encourages readers to consider how one could have done it better.

Each Headstand story is put back on its feet to save the most important lessons for a posterity that will hopefully be even more successful in implementing Engaged Learning. The stories are representative of the realisation: the biggest mistake in Engaged Learning initiatives is not taking the first concrete step towards implementing real projects out of fear of making mistakes.

4.2 Methodological Approach

The following two stories are presented and then analysed, in order to show examples of how (crucial aspects of) Engaged Learning should NOT be done. The first story is based on participant observation which has showed an Engaged Learning seminar to be unsuccessful as reported by the participants, externals, and the observer himself.

The second story emerged from a so-called Reversed Brainstorming with a teacher and students which was part of a Lightning Decision Jam (LDJ). This method is about defining action steps for a specific challenge that are as concrete as possible and can be implemented within a few weeks, based on an overarching, more general problem theme.

As in "normal" brainstorming, a problem is posed at the beginning, which is transformed into a key question to be answered jointly by a group - for example:

- *How can we attract students from different disciplines to participate in our Engaged Learning Initiative?*

The underlying problem here is the lack of interdisciplinarity of the Engaged Learning initiative, which limits the existing pool of knowledge and skills to one academic discipline. As a result, complex societal challenges, which often require multi-perspective solutions, can only be dealt with in a rather one-sided manner.

"The hallmark [of the Reversed Brainstorming] method is the alienation of the problem by turning the original key question of the case narrator <>upside down<> and thus into its opposite. [...] The headstand offers the possibility of considerably broadening the case teller's horizon by breaking down blocks to thinking and opening up new problem-solving perspectives." (Tietze 2018, p. 123, Translated from German)

After a problem is reformulated into a key question, this key question is turned into its opposite. If we stay with our example, the opposite key question could be as follows:

- *How can we fail to attract students from different disciplines to participate in our Engaged Learning Initiative?*

or, in terms of exacerbating the current problem situation:

- *How can we shield our initiative from students from other disciplines so that it is just us?*

After the opposite key question has been agreed upon, the participants, start collecting as many answers to the opposite key question as possible. A recorder collects the answers for all to see, e.g., on a flipchart or a (digital) whiteboard. The collected answers are reviewed together and clarified - however, evaluations of individual answers are taboo! If there are many answers, it is advisable to cluster them or to let the participants select the best (i.e., actually worst) answers in order to go into them in more detail. Possible answers could be:

- *We design and advertise seminars through which students can participate in our initiative only in the seminar catalogue of our own degree programme.*
- *We determine the perspective with which to look at societal challenges from the outset and exclude other perspectives on it.*
- *We devalue disciplines other than our own through the publicly perceived use of stereotypes: computer scientists are nerds, philosophers become unemployed after graduation, social scientists are politically radical, medical doctors are stuck-up, lawyers are know-it-all, geologists chew on rocks and biologists dig around in the dirt - only we from discipline x have a real plan.*

All or only the "best" answers are eventually put back "on their feet" i.e., reformulated to address the original key question.

- *We design and publish seminars in which students from different disciplines can participate.*
- *We also remain open to perspectives on societal challenges that seem unusual or strange and try to understand that perspective before evaluating it.*
- *We cultivate a climate of mutual respect, which includes refraining from devaluing others as well as clarifying conflicts and misunderstandings together.*

4.3 Bench's Seminar

"I am irritated, my impression of the seminar today is as follows: There is a lot of talk here, a lot of 'shoulds', 'coulds', but nothing is concretised. I leave the seminar frozen and in a bad mood." (Participant observation 04.12.2020)

This is the mental conclusion of my participant observation at Prof. Bench's (name changed) seminar - what happened?

The first time I met Prof. Bench was on a cold and wet Saturday in September 2020 during a festive get-together of an Engaged Learning project in Magdeburg. I was looking for relevant actors who could provide me with exciting insights into the university's Engaged Learning initiative, for my research project, and was sipping a plastic cup of cider forlornly in the midst of the party crowd. It quickly became clear to me that Bench was one of those relevant project actors I was looking for, since he managed to steal the project leader away from me, with whom I had started a conversation, only by appearing at the party. When I observed him a little later furtively chuckling with a city councillor about new appointments in Magdeburg city hall, the case was clear to me and I said to myself: "You must manage to establish yourself as a participant observer in Bench's Seminar!"

My mission was reinforced by the fact that I met Bench again just four days later at a Third Mission strategy meeting at the University, and here too his comments were noted as significant by the other participants. "The city and city administration have a strong internal view [...] very little is changed and seen in a new way" (Participant observation 30.09.2020), Bench complained with regard to the cooperation between the city and the university. This is, Bench continues, why a larger-scale funding project had to be applied for to the responsible state ministry. In Bench's view, the existing cooperation between the city and the university was only a "nice to have" (*ibid.*) anyway.

As a contrasting i.e., necessary initiative "to get administration and councils moving" (description from the seminar catalogue WS 2020/21), Bench himself offered a seminar at this time that was supposed to "introduce students to concrete and really implementation-oriented projects [...] and motivate them to implement them creatively" (*ibid.*). This practice-oriented seminar in connection with the person Bench, who had been so well integrated into various intra- and extra-university networks, seemed like it was made for my participant observation and so I contacted Bench, which enabled me to start my research work already on the first seminar date in November 2020.

It's cold outside, it's chilly in the seminar room, which is because the heating doesn't work. As if to defy the cold, Bench gives a fiery opening statement to the eight students and me:

"The world is even riper to change it [...] I hope to motivate you to change things in this city [...] Not only in this city – If you are good, you can transfer that to other cities" (Participant Observation 20.11.2020)

The aim of the seminar is to design individual urban projects that would result in a project manual or project outline as a course assignment. But first Bench lectures on Magdeburg as a reform city of modernity, which had flourished thanks to its mayors Hermann Beims (1919-1931) and Ernst Reuter (1931-1933). "We need people like that today," (*ibid.*) Bench says and asks the rhetorical question: "And a hundred years later?", which he immediately answers with: "Small, small, small. If you want to do ANYTHING in this city, there are

blockades." (ibid.). Therefore, he appeals to the students: "If you do your own projects, look at what other cities have done and take that into your argumentation with the bureaucrats!" (ibid.) The bureaucrats, it turns out, are the city administration, which, according to Bench, always puts forward "killer arguments" (ibid.) to avoid individual urban projects - like those of the students in the seminar.

The individual urban projects or their sketchy ideas from past semesters are presented by Bench himself after his contextualising opening, including:

- *Publicly accessible cupboards in which books donated by private individuals and libraries can be stored free of charge and taken out of them. The plan is for the long-term unemployed to build these cupboards, which will then be spray-painted by young people and regularly checked for damage by residents of old people's homes and reported if necessary.*
- *A photography exhibition entitled "Ugly Magdeburg", in which the ugliness of places in the city is presented with the aim of shaking up, sharpening perceptions again and problematising. According to Bench, the background to this is that the citizens of the city no longer consciously perceive its ugliness due to their habits.*
- *The commercial production and marketing of a beer that, according to its name, refers to the Premonstratensian order (once) resident in the city.*
- *A vaporetto modelled on Venice i.e., a public water transport system on the Elbe in the city area.*

Again and again, Bench appeals for students to talk, think, plan, act together, to transcend their own interests and boundaries, and instead to gather the "right people" (ibid.) to get away from "everyone for themselves" (ibid.). "I wanted to talk, talk, talk, so that you see what you can do [...] I wanted to motivate you," (ibid.) Bench sums up, concluding both his monologue and the seminar.

The second date of the course, which was designed as a four-hour block seminar, took place at the beginning of December 2020. Bench had called in advance for students to bring notebooks to the seminar to work together on the project outlines. As the heating of the student self-organised room is still not working, everyone present is wearing their winter jackets, scarves and hats during the seminar, in addition to their warming notebooks. Since Bench and the students are obviously just as cold as I am, I ask the students whether the room administration has already been informed about the problem with the heating, to which one student replies: "no [...] I don't want to talk to the [room administration] right now." (Participant observation 04.12.2020) The background to this was that the room that the initiative had been given for temporary use had recently been released by the room administration for viewing by other prospective tenants, which made it seem likely that the initiative would move to new premises.

Prof. Bench, wrapped in a winter coat, scarf and his own arms, accepts the student's statement without comment and begins his seminar by interjecting the term "Third Mission". He asks, addressing the students, if they have heard of it and know what it is. The student, who had just announced her refusal to communicate, replies that third mission is about "taking research and teaching into society" (*ibid.*). Bench affirms the student's answer, says: "and you are part of it" (*ibid.*) and uses this as a transition for his call to the students to inspire and carry people along with their projects to be conceived in the seminar. For this, Bench continues, they need a "watertight" (*ibid.*) overall concept.

What follows, as in the first seminar session, is Bench's monologue about the same project ideas as last time: bookcases, Ugly Magdeburg, Premonstratensian beer, Elbe vaporetto, et cetera. After a while of repetition, in which neither noteworthy new information nor student contributions to the seminar events could be documented, Bench again calls on the students to transform their project-ideas into written concepts, without presenting, let alone offering, concrete instruments and methods for doing so. I slide around uneasily on my chair - not only because I am freezing - am torn and then decide to leave my researcher role and offer Bench to send him and the students a digital project guide that I have already used in the past for my own projects. Bench accepts the offer with thanks - and continues in the same lecture manner until the end of the seminar. At this point I write the reflection quoted at the beginning in my field diary and leave the seminar for good, also because I have found a more interesting Engaged Learning seminar in the meantime in which I can participate as an observer.

But here, too, I encounter a project idea mentioned in the Bench seminar: the bookcases. A student brings the idea of publicly accessible bookcases to the seminar of the lecturer Rem (name changed), in which the theoretical and practical examination of urban diversity is on the curriculum. Fellow students are also familiar with the idea and share their concerns about the possible destruction of such cases and the permission that has to be obtained from the civil engineering office to place such lockers in Magdeburg's city centre. Rem brushes these concerns aside and calls on the students to just try and do it i.e., to build and set up such a bookcase in the first place. Once that is done, Rem says, they can still see where it is going and respond to real problems, instead of hypothetical ones. One student argues to Rem that Prof. Bench had called on them to make a big project out of it, to get official supporters on board and to install not just one, but many bookcases spread all over the city. "You can make it big and official and get a lot of applause," (Participant observation 11.11.2020) Rem replies, noting that all ideas and concepts need people who feel responsible for them and implement them, after which the idea can grow - "Otherwise it remains just a nice idea" (*ibid.*) he says. For the realisation of projects like the bookcases, Rem gives the students a guideline from the first idea, through concrete planning and practical implementation to reflection and evaluation, as well as a format template in which to present the implemented projects.

I remember that Rem had also attended the Third Mission strategy meeting where Prof. Bench presented his large-scale project idea. To the statement of a university teacher present that there were "massive ideas" (Participant observation 30.09.2020) at the university, Rem interjected: "Yes, but they don't get off the ground" (ibid.). In fact, Bench's and his students project idea(s) at the time never got off the ground. However, he is still pursuing his idea "to increase Magdeburg's urbanity [by] initially installing 20 fixed bookcases in the cityscape" (from the description in the seminar catalogue SS 2022) in the form of a "seminar". Rem, with whom I once talked about my experiences in the Bench seminar, meanwhile rolls his eyes in annoyance at the subject of bookcases. He "doesn't want to dictate anything to [his students]" (Participant observation 11.11.2020) and is "discreetly holding back" (ibid.), as he is "not laying a project at the students' feet" (ibid.), because it is about their ideas and above all their implementation.

It is mid-April 2021, it is finally getting warmer, and I receive an email from a student:

"Dear Mr Chmelka,

My name is Laura (name changed), I [...] am currently supervising my fellow students in their project work at the Project Café. Prof. Bench had pointed out to me that you have created a project manual that can serve as a guide for the project presentation. Since I think that it would be helpful for me and the entire degree programme, I wanted to ask you if you could make it available to me. I would like to use it in the project café and pass it on to my fellow students as a guide.

Thank you very much in advance!

Laura" (E-Mail 13.04.2021)

I feel taken back to a cold morning in the Bench seminar and the title of a text that the Professor had presented as an introduction comes to my mind: "No one has ever been here for pleasure".

4.3.1 Prof. Bench turns the core ideas of Engaged Learning on their head with his seminar.

As an established and well-connected professional, he can look back on many years of practical experience, draw on a considerable body of knowledge and boast a respectable list of implemented projects - which actually makes him a shining example for his students. However, Bench outshines the flickering lights of the students i.e., he and his stories of his own successes and ideas leave little room for the first tentative project steps of the students, whose careers are still at the very beginning. Instead of motivating them to implement their own ideas in practice, Bench puts his own ideas - in our story these were prominently the bookcases - on the agenda.

Moreover, the projects proposed by Bench are so complex that it is hard to imagine undergraduate students being able to fully sketch them out in the few weeks of a semester, let alone implement them. This is most extreme with the idea of the Vaporetto, which is a multi-million project that requires years of planning. Small-scale and thus realistically realisable projects, on the other hand, are dismissed by Bench - even though the seminar description talks about "concrete and really implementation-oriented projects". Here, student expectations regarding both the seminar and their own self-efficacy will be disappointed.

But even if small-scale projects were not discarded from the outset, the students would not have been given any instruments and methods by Bench to work on them anyway - all they have are anecdotes. If, against all odds, they manage to tackle their own projects, these anecdotes will fail them at the latest when they are confronted with real feedback on their project designs. This is best illustrated by the idea of "Ugly Magdeburg". Imagine a young student arrives, possibly he or she was not born and raised in Magdeburg, perhaps he or she has even only recently moved to the city - and already this student presumes to insult his or her fellow citizens as perceptually disturbed fools, by pointing out the ugliness of their city. As if this humiliation is already enough to solve actual problems in the city, no concrete suggestions of their own are provided on how ugly places could be beautified – Ivory tower attitude par excellence.

Possibly, however, it is actually a matter of accusing the city, and here in particular the administrative staff seen as responsible for its design, of not having the greatness and stature of past mayors anyway. It is true, that the Magdeburg in which Beims and Reuter were mayors is by no means the Magdeburg of today. This is because between them lie almost 100 years, a world war that brought the complete destruction of Magdeburg's inner city, its reconstruction under Soviet-established foreign rule and the economic collapse and new beginning after German reunification. Bench is soft on the subject, but hard on the people - to denigrate the supposedly responsible people in the city administration over and over again vis-à-vis the students and to frame them as opponents who must be overcome is definitely not in the spirit of an equitable, mutually beneficial partnership. At the same time, it shifts the responsibility for urban development, which Bench also wants to see as participatory as possible, towards one institution and thus away from budding academics

4.3.2 If we turn this right side up, what should we do differently?

The more established a teacher is, the more they should hold back on the specific content of student projects. One should play the role of a midwife who now and then provides practical guidance and a feeling of safety but otherwise leaves room for trial and error. Anecdotes should be introduced sparingly and not without being asked, in order to leave room for students' own experiences and not to prejudice or intimidate them. Tools and methods that have worked for the established teacher, on the other hand, should definitely be shared with

students and their use tested together - "Give a starving man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a starving man to fish and you feed him for life." Low-threshold and realistically implementable projects are better than complex and long-term ideas. Sure, 20 bookshelves in the whole city would be better than just one, but one realised bookshelf is always better than 20 paper tigers. Small projects that are successfully implemented by students are also a learning experience that can motivate them to take on the next project bigger. Here, for example, it can help to check objectives and project plans with the SMART criteria grid i.e., they should be specific, measurable, attractive, realistic and terminated.

The thing about ivory towers is that while they look lofty, they are quite fragile structures - nothing that can withstand the onslaught of outraged fellow citizens. From the once beautiful view from the top of the tower, you fall low and hit the hard ground of extra-academic realities. It is the responsibility of experienced teachers like Bench to anticipate such scenarios and at least offer themselves as a sparring partner to their students, exposing weaknesses while they are still in the safe teaching space. Related to this, humility and compromise should be exemplified as virtues by teachers. The multidimensional, highly complex and historically evolved challenges even in the local will not be solved in one semester by a few Engaged Learning projects, even though they can make their contribution. So, while the trajectory of a current challenge should not be ignored, it is important to act in the here and now rather than invoking supposedly more glorious times past.

Of course, one should fight for one's own concerns. However, the following applies: Be tough on the issues, but soft on the people! Antipathies can hardly be avoided when working with many different people, but they should not be escalated into personal feuds that make it difficult, if not impossible, to work together on the matter at hand. Obviously hardened conflicts like the one between the student and the building management should not be ignored, but instead invite joint discussions. Here, teachers must act as mediators or at least moderators of the conflict or seek appropriate support.

Oh yes, and a warm seminar room would also be conducive to a learning atmosphere in which everyone feels comfortable and involved.

4.4 Lightning Decision Jam

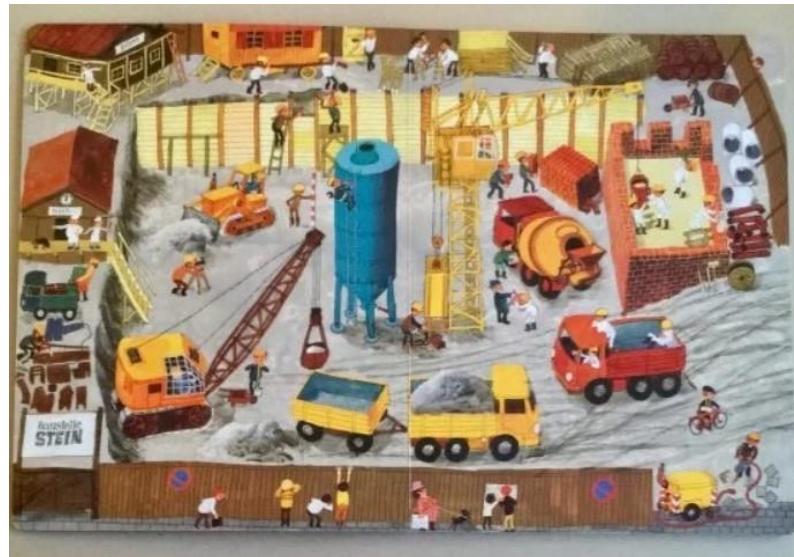
In the second example, I conducted a so-called Lightning Decision Jam (LDJ) in June 2022, together with eight students and one teacher of an Engaged Learning Initiative. The reason for this was several discussions with the teacher responsible for the project, in which a need for a quick and as concrete as possible structuring of short- to medium-term tasks emerged. The initiative had the following complex challenges at that time:

- *Conduct a self-evaluation for impact analysis to better design the matching between demands of the community partners and the potential offer of the students*

- *Organise accompanying research*
- *Determine the direction of the project or adjust its direction*
- *Either enter into local, regional, national and international cooperation or further cultivate and expand existing ones*
- *Acquire funding*
- *Increase the visibility and reputation of the project through ongoing and appealing documentation*
- *Make semester transitions smoother*

While first steps had already been taken to overcome some of these complex challenges, which were crucial for the further course of the initiative, the actors were still at the very beginning with others. Since a large part of the time and energy capacities of all those involved in the initiative was already tied up by day-to-day operational activities, the need for an overarching strategic development perspective could not be satisfied on its own.

Figure 1: Construction site by Ali Mitgutsch. The participants were asked to locate themselves in the picture and to relate this symbolically to their location in the Engaged Learning project



At the beginning and after a brief introduction of personnel and content, the initiative was framed as a metaphorical construction site. For this, the nine participants were first asked to position themselves on a construction site hidden object picture from a children's book with the help of toy figures (Fig. 1). Then each person was asked about the length of time they had been working on the

"construction site", about their current work task and finally about their assessment of the status of the entire "construction site".

Two thirds of the participants, it turned out, had only been working in the initiative since the beginning of the summer semester 2022, so they did not yet have a deeper insight into strategic developments and concerns. As only one third of the participants could competently assess the status of complex challenges the overarching topic of the LDJ was kept general initially, instead of working on a concrete complex challenge. After the students and their teacher were asked together about aspects that were already working well on the "construction site", the moderator moved on to asking about aspects that were not working (well). From the responses to the latter question, the participants each chose the one to three most relevant problems from their point of view. The top voted problem was finally reframed as a key question:

- *How could we implement (more of) our own projects?*

This is where the headstand method or reversed brainstorming described at the beginning came into action. The formulated key question was turned "upside down" i.e., reversed into its opposite:

- *How could we stop implementing our own projects?*

All participants were then asked to generate as many aggravation solutions as possible:

- *Not showing initiative*
- *doing forbidden things*
- *not taking responsibility*
- *not asking for help with problems and questions*
- *scaring away sponsors and supporters*
- *mindset: "I can't do that"*
- *spending all the Initiative's money on drinks*
- *allowing oneself to be taken over politically*
- *no longer talking to each other about projects or always just talking and not being concrete.*

In a joint round, the aggravation solutions were finally put back "on their feet" i.e., reshaped in such a way that they could contribute to tackling the original key question. These positive solution approaches were again subjected to prioritisation. The most selected solutions were plotted on an effort-impact-graph (see Figure 2), which can be separated into quarters (Figure 3) to demonstrate the before and after process.

Figure 2: effort-impact-graph

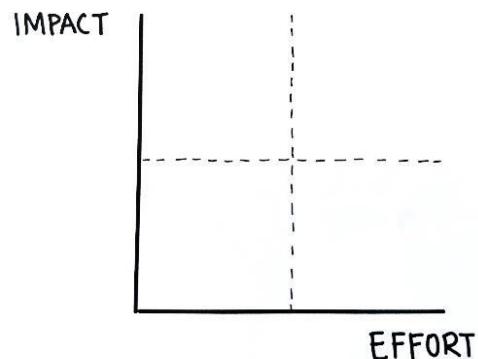


Figure 3: quartered effort-impact-graph; visuals by Ines Schaffranek



Solutions with high effort and low impact should be forgotten for now - this creates welcome relief. Nevertheless, thanks to the documentation of the workshop, they could be considered in later decision rounds if the assessment of their impact or effort changes or just be kept in mind.

- *Do not allow yourself to be politically influenced!*

Such solutions, which have a high expected impact but an equally high effort, should be considered as independent projects or are an integral part of the initiative as a whole and should therefore be placed on its agenda:

- *Clarify self- and team responsibility, show initiative!*

Solutions that have a low impact as well as effort can be turned into tasks to be completed with the help of a simple "formula" - WHO, does WHAT by WHEN:

- *Clear demarcation from the right-wing populist and far-right political party AfD, which operates in the city council (14.4% of the vote) and in the federal state (20.8% of the vote)*

Solutions with a high expected impact and low effort should be implemented immediately i.e., within one to two weeks:

- *Ask for support from the teacher or fellow students*
- *Talk about sub-projects with clear objectives*
- *Always leave discussions as concrete as possible*
- *Argue constructively*
- *Focus money and resources on projects*

For this purpose, actionable steps are worked out in the workshop, which are to be taken on the way to implementation.

- *Use the plenary to present the current status of the projects and to jointly determine the next steps!*
- *Encourage participation in the plenary!*
- *Change the plenary session so that it becomes less of a chore and more of a fun event!*
- *The plenary session chair addresses each participant directly!*
- *Financial managers: Reduce funds for drinks and other expenses!*
- *Create a first draft of a project wall, which is publicly displayed!*

The LDJ ends with short oral feedback from the participants and the workshop leader. Afterwards, all those present discuss whether the format should be repeated at all in the future and if so, regularly or on an ad hoc basis.

4.5 Discussion and Conclusions

The article reveals one of the main problems of Engaged Learning formats: The lack of practical implementation of good ideas. Teachers and students struggle to detach themselves a bit from the ideals of their theories and models and to implement first concrete steps for small-scale projects in trial-and-error mode. The reason could be summed up with this statement by the non-university partner: "Oh yes, I'm here at the university, everything always has to be completely finished here". Those who are in search of truths and knowledge obviously find it difficult to endure a degree of uncertainty and to act in the unknown.

Whether scientists who are more trained in explorative methodologies in which working with indeterminacy is the normal state of affairs, have fewer problems with this and thus find it easier to implement projects would be an exciting question for a separate investigation. The same applies to the assumption that this is a problem that applies in particular to universities whose focus is on teaching theory and basic research - here, insights into Engaged Learning initiatives at universities of applied sciences would be revealing.

As insightful as the Bench Seminar critique may be, it remains highly questionable whether teachers - especially established professors - are open to such reflections and would be able to forge new paths. Such blunt criticism is likely to be perceived as impertinence by those who have literally been called to teach, and to provoke defensive reactions to which junior academics are inferior. But even if the criticism may not reach those who give rise to it, it can fuel a broad discourse on whether current criteria for teaching authorisation are still up to date and whether the often-proclaimed lifelong learning also applies to established professors. However, this should not be solely about personnel issues. The benchmark of criticism should always be the successful education of young people in our educational institutions. What exactly is meant by success - a lower drop-out rate, better adaptation to societal needs, more cutting-edge research, you name it – and whether Engaged Learning initiatives actually make their contribution to it must be subjected to an equally (self-)critical analysis.

The article also tries to show that Engaged Learning is less about the production of new knowledge - this is already one of the core competences of universities - but about the means of production themselves. Nor is it about denying the "traditional" means of production of teaching, such as lectures and literature seminars, their *raison d'être*. It is about making additional use of such means, whose emergence and development took place outside the sciences and universities.

Experience shows that many colleagues still roll their eyes in annoyance when there is talk of counselling and coaching or when moderation cards and activating methods are used instead of completely overloaded PowerPoint slides which are recited in a monotone voice. But it shows, that where the headstand method was used in the context of a Lightening Decision Jam, the format was well-suited to exchanging ideas in a structured way. The fact that there was a lot of overlap between the participants is a sign that the team was operating on the same frequency – This can be a comforting revelation for groups confronted with ongoing problems. Furthermore, it was possible to identify the most relevant challenge at the moment and to work out how to overcome it.

The headstand method was perceived as helpful and entertaining. The approaches to solutions that can be implemented directly are not completely new, but point to an exchange format that has been established in the initiative for a long time - the plenary - and its necessary adaptation. This is another indication that it is not a question of reinventing the wheel, but of using existing potential more effectively. At the same time, it opens up new ways of

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understanding and cooperating with non-university partners for whom the original academic working traditions are too cerebral.

After all, I tried to describe a very classic scientific experience - you don't have to turn the world but yourself upside down, take a new perspective to gain new knowledge about it.

5 Expectation management: An obligatory part of Engaged Learning Initiatives

Sampo Ruoppila, Pirjo Turtiainen, & Laura Mänki

University of Turku, Finland

Abstract

At the heart of the universities “third mission” is the idea that their expertise can be used in collaboration with various stakeholders to solve societal problems. This chapter discusses how Engaged Learning applies that idea to university teaching. It is a university driven learning exercise with strong community involvement, where activities of teaching and learning are combined with civic engagement. The chapter focuses on what kind of communication it requires with the community partners in the planning stage. Discussing the setting and the character of the activities with the collaborators is down to three main factors: how Engaged Learning connects with university studies; what the role of the community partner is; and what benefits community partners can expect.

Keywords: Engaged Learning, Community Engagement, Third mission, Societal impact, Expectations management

5.1 Introduction

The demands on universities to have a proactive role in shaping society, spreading the knowledge and helping to apply it for public benefit are commonplace. Contemporary universities are considered to have three missions: research, teaching and societal engagement. The last, “third mission”, includes research and teaching related social, enterprise, and innovation activities (Zomer & Benneworth, 2011). While the role of collaborative research, bringing academics and practitioners together, has become rock-solid, teaching-methods designed for exposing students (in a university course) to the “real world” and learning how to apply their theoretical knowledge in practice, are not yet mainstream. This is what Engaged Learning is about. It is demand-orientated and problem-centred, involving application, and transdisciplinary approach. The students are armed with theoretical concepts and ideas when they confront real-life situations, and must reflect on their learnings when developing their ideas and implementation. (Chmelka et al., 2020.)

Engaged Learning, also referred to as Community-Engaged Learning (e.g. Bandy, 2011; Berard & Ravelli, 2021), builds on ideas of Service-Learning, but gives even a stronger emphasis on the community involvement. Activities of teaching and learning are combined with civic engagement (Bandy, 2011). Service-learning has been defined as a course-based, credit-bearing, educational, experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service-activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service-activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Engaged Learning shares all that, but with one additional requirement: reciprocity. Partnership with the community means that they too should have an influence in the design and implementation of the course (towards “real needs”) and should also receive real benefits from the engagement activities (Sany & Holland, 2006; the Europe Engage 2018 cited in Chmelka et al. 2020, p. 13). Civic engagement is consciously reflected in the light of a specific learning goal.

Engaged Learning is, nonetheless, an activity initiated and driven by the higher educational institution, meaning that the collaboration is first and foremost framed by the learning targets. In order to adapt to the curricula, the chosen community task must fit within this framework. Engagement is also limited by the course itself; while the university provides results (insight) for the civic users, their further use depends on the civic actors themselves. This makes Engaged Learning different from Science Shops and both are examples of innovation in university-community collaboration. Widely known in some European countries and hardly at all in others, Science Shops are community-anchored research organisations that often have strong links to local universities. However, they work somewhat autonomously, carrying out independent research, but also working on product and service development for local civil society (see SciShops, 2022). These two ways of engagement may also work together. Community-driven Science Shops have the potential to be useful platforms to which course-based Engaged Learning initiatives can be associated and benefit from their accumulated local knowledge and contacts. However, they are by no means a pre-requisite to start an Engaged Learning initiative.

The rest of the chapter discusses the university-driven Engaged Learning from the perspective of what kind of communication it requires with the community partners when planning the initiatives.

5.2 Managing Expectations of Community Engagement

Managing expectations is a communicative process aimed at clarifying all parties' understanding of a set that they are part of, including their own roles as well as the roles of other stakeholders (partners). Within the context of Engaged Learning, the need to manage the community partners' expectations stems from three crucial considerations: the university engages the community partner but very much remains in the driver's seat; the students' role is learning and as such

oftentimes a variable not a constant; and the project itself will be limited by the constraints of the course and time frame.

Curricula-based Engaged Learning initiatives take place within a basic structure already created by the educational institution. They get implemented within the constraints of a certain learning frame, tuition resources and time. The community involvement is initiated within this frame. It usually takes place through discussions of the community representatives' needs, which serve as a significant input to the course content. Yet the ideas can be accommodated only to an extent of a certain pre-designed course topic, structure and learning content. This is the first point worth discussing together.

The collaboration takes the form of student projects, where they apply their skills to tackle the issues that are of interest to the civic partners. The "tackling" is usually an exercise of research or applied use of research knowledge(ability) and involves mutual learning with civil society, including expert partners and the grassroots level. The characteristics of the work, an idea of the type of results, and the extent to which students have time to develop them, is another point to tackle. Of course, in different fields, different kinds of course frames imply different limitations. If the course content is about a method, like applying creative production (as in the case of the CaST initiative Kinder Exeter, see Anderson et al., 2022), it gives more room to plan the thematic content with the civil society (but directs the applied process). This contrasts with a course that already has a thematic context, yet many possible sub-topics, like the urban studies course on contemporary development of housing estates conducted at the University of Turku (see Ruoppila et al., 2022). Either way, the university-driven learning frame of the Engaged Learning course is established first, and communications with collaboration partners begin only thereafter.

It is really important to clarify and manage the expectations of all partners at the planning stage of any Engaged Learning project. Discussing the setting and the character of the activities with the collaborators is down to three main factors which should be addressed in the preparatory stage: (i) how Engaged Learning connects with university studies; (ii) what the role of the community partner is; and (iii) what benefits community partners can expect.

5.2.1 What Engaged Learning means and how it connects with university studies

A central point to note is that Engaged Learning is first and foremost a learning exercise arranged for university students. It often means that students are conducting some sort of mini-study resembling research, ideation or advisory project. However, these are not full-scale academic or expert duties, and should not be expected to be such. Therefore, the extent to which the students are able to familiarise themselves with the relevant literature and contextual information, the methods of analysis they use, and hence the size (or representativeness) of data they are able to produce, are likely to be limited. Nevertheless, the projects may provide new and interesting insights. As a training exercise with societal

benefits in mind, they usually are free-of-charge for the collaborators. Even if the results would be a little superficial, the cost-benefit ratio is likely to be great.

Working with civil society (including NGOs and municipalities), the university teachers need to note that different parties have varying degrees of ideas about what university studies or collaborating with academia means. Furthermore, some partners might have experiences with applied universities, while the perspectives of more research-intensive universities might be new to them. Therefore, when preparing the collaboration, it is a good idea to walk the partners through the process, describing the students' capabilities and limitations, and what they are expected or likely to achieve, and being ready to answer questions.

The key take-away for community partners is that the learning goals will frame the student involvement and that this is a traineeship.

5.2.2 The community partner's role and significance of their input

The role of the community partner varies case by case. Nonetheless, usually it includes at least provision of information on the community perspectives, interests and (perhaps variety of) views. This information is provided to the students either directly or indirectly via the teachers (who are framing the course) and it is essential contextual knowledge. Nevertheless, it might be good idea to discuss this information with reference to the study frame, for instance how central it might be (or not) regarding the chosen topic.

The community partners should become aware that the information they provide is important for contextualisation, but also that their views cannot be considered as a wish-list and not all the topics will likely be followed. An additional point to note is that if the collaboration includes several stakeholders (e.g. several NGOs), they might have different (even conflicting) expectations. Collaborators might also be expected to have an active (e.g. advisory) role during the course—worth discussing during the preparations—or they might be invited to discuss the results and give feedback.

The key take-away for the community partner's role is that they are mentors and offer valuable contextual information in their advisory role.

5.2.3 The community partners' benefits

New insights and new points of view are what universities can promise to the community partners' benefit. Perspectives nourished not only by academic research, but also the students' own take on the issue, are likely to give them new thoughts to familiar areas or phenomena. Although the collaborator's interests might have varied (and not all of them were followed), and even if the student exercises were limited in scope, the results are likely to give several new insights. Moreover, they are likely to evoke useful new ideas to the community partners (e.g. on identifying new customers, ideas for policy argumentation or even on drawing funding applications). Yet in this respect, the stakeholders

should become aware that unless otherwise explicitly agreed, Engaged Learning is more likely to deliver new knowledge or insight, rather than co-create solutions to issues identified by the partner. Nonetheless, partners can and should be encouraged to use the results and turn them into useful actions.

The key take-away for the community partner's benefit is that they are likely to get new insights which they may apply how they wish.

Table 1. Managing community partners' expectations: the key questions.

"What is this all about?"
WHY. Unfamiliarity with the concept Engaged Learning and possibly academic collaboration in general.
SOLVE. Clarifying the concept of Engaged Learning. Being aware that this is a learning experience rather than full-scale academic research.
"What is expected from us?"
WHY. Stakeholders' uncertainty about their role.
SOLVE. Discussing and communicating the tasks and contributions.
"What will we get out of this?"
WHY. Uncertainty of outcomes stakeholders may expect.
SOLVE. Clarifying the characteristics of outcomes.
"How can our voice be heard?"
WHY. Different (even conflicting) expectations between partners.
SOLVE. Clarifying that the project cannot accommodate any individual partner, or produce pre-specified information or results. Making sure partners can voice their topical issues and concerns.
"What exactly are the students doing?"
WHY. Varying readiness for working with academia.
SOLVE. Walking partners through the process and answering questions.
"What's in it for me?"
WHY. Varying interests between individuals in NGOs.
SOLVE. Communicating that the results are likely to give several new insights to familiar issues.
"What happens after this?"
WHY. Uncertainty of how stakeholders can use the results.
SOLVE. Being aware that Engaged Learning is research rather than co-creation—but partners can themselves turn the results into activities.

5.3 Concluding remarks

Even if Engaged Learning is driven by university professionals as they plan the course contents, the community partners' role is crucial in connecting it in the real-life context, and bringing to the fore their perspective(s) and expertise(s). This contextualisation with real cases and real challenges, makes students apply their knowledge in the way central to Engaged Learning. While planning the courses, it is recommendable to have the community partners sitting around the table, so they understand what students are expected to do, what they themselves are expected to do, and what sorts of results might be achievable. The fact that it is first and foremost a student exercise should be emphasised. Nonetheless, the community partners can expect to reap the benefit of new insights and new points of view. A list of key issues is elaborated in Table 1.

The intention of Engaged Learning is a way for the university to reach out to the community and to build bridges between stakeholders through a series of actions. How that is done exactly, varies widely. Nonetheless, it is important that the stakeholders are examined by making key connections with the community. Managing expectations should form an obligatory part of the planning.

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6 Improving engagement between the university and voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors

Devon Community Foundation

Nicola Frost

Abstract

The voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector is a large, diverse, and significant sector in Devon, in the South West of England. It represents significant size and social and economic value.

There is huge enthusiasm from University of Exeter and VCSE stakeholders for increased and deepened partnering to facilitate community engaged learning and research as well as more strategic collaboration. However, as individual organisations are generally small, relationships between university and community organisations involve inevitable inequalities in size and power. As the dominant partner, it is incumbent on the university to be aware of this, and vigilant in its efforts to mitigate the deleterious effects of such hierarchy. It is therefore important for universities to consider not only what engagement with the VCSE sector might be desirable, but also how that engagement is initiated, conducted, and evaluated.

Recent research undertaken by Devon Community Foundation on behalf of the University of Exeter, found that although existing VCSE engagement with the University of Exeter is extensive, diverse and impactful, its visibility (and therefore recognition of its value) is limited, often because of its relatively small scale and the level of formality with which it is conducted.

This paper discusses the challenges of VCSE-university engagement and makes some recommendations for universities wanting to strengthen their capacity to work more effectively and productively with the VCSE sector.

Keywords: Voluntary Sector, community engagement, collaboration, mutual benefit

6.1 Introduction

The voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector is a large, diverse, and significant sector for Devon in the South West of England. According to the

NCVO Almanac for 2020 (NCVO, 2021) which considers only registered charities, the South West region has the third highest number of charities in the UK, after London and the South East (where many of the larger charities are headquartered) – a total of 17,453, employing 106,364 people. However, recent research by Devon Community Foundation, on behalf of the University of Exeter, revealed some uncertainty within the University about the scope, size and composition of this sector.

This sector includes registered charities and social enterprises, as well as any unincorporated organisation with a social purpose. No comprehensive data source exists for the precise size of the sector in Devon – the very nature of unincorporated organisations is that they are not registered either with the Charity Commission or Companies House. But Devon alone is home to nearly 4000 general charities, with a collective annual income of £584 million. Essence, the Social Enterprise Network for the Exeter area estimates there are roughly 2000 registered social enterprises (those with a social purpose) in Devon. Importantly, most of these organisations are either small or very small: 86% of Devon charities have an annual income of under £100,000, and almost half have an income of less than £10,000. There are a few branches of larger national organisations, such as the National Trust, but many of these are actually locally constituted and largely autonomous (e.g., AGEUK).

There is no doubting the collective size and social and economic significance of the sector. However, the fact that the large majority of individual organisations are small can mean this significance is overlooked; the sector is difficult for a large body such as the university to ‘read’. The sector feels it is important their organisations’ collective value is recognised, not only as enablers of social good, inclusivity and community wellbeing, nor even as worthy recipients of fundraising and volunteering support, but as locations of expertise and knowledge, as crucial participants in strategic conversations, and as contributors to the local economy and attractive employers of Exeter graduates.

Relationships between university and community organisations will inevitably involve clear inequalities in size and power. It is therefore very important for universities to consider, not only what engagement with the VCSE sector might be desirable, but also how that engagement is initiated, conducted, and evaluated, and who is involved.

Inevitably, voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations can face challenges in engaging successfully with universities. Many of these are practical concerns, with practical solutions, but it is important to keep in mind the principle that ought to inform any remedial action. Currently, the operational and financial complexities of engagement inhibit equality of access for those who struggle to navigate them. This is a wasted opportunity for both the excluded organisations, and the university.

6.2. Method

This research looked at present and potential relationships between the University of Exeter and organisations within the VCSE sector across Devon. It was commissioned as a scoping and consultation exercise to inform the University's development of Civic University Agreements (University of Exeter, 2021) with external partners.

The study drew on the extensive experience of Devon Community Foundation in multi-faceted engagement with the University of Exeter over several years. It also gathered insights from research conducted in summer 2020 in a project co-managed with the University of Exeter, which examined the hosting of students on Engaged Learning programmes within voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations. Some of the principles outlined here also make reference to the *Roads to Renewal: Towards Genuine Partnership* report (Devon Communities Foundation, 2021), co-written by a group of VCSE organisations, and published in February 2021. The co-authors of that report very clearly see engagement with the university within a broader cross-sectoral partnership context, rather than as an isolated topic.

Primary research for this report drew on responses to a survey of VCSE organisations conducted in April 2021, along with semi-structured interviews with around fifteen key stakeholders, both those from VCSE organisations, and those with which they engage within the university. These responses come from organisations working with young people, those involved in community development, arts and cultural organisations, grassroots community associations, those working to encourage sport and physical activity, and those supporting people with disabilities, among many others. The research was also discussed in meetings of two groups central to strategic cross-sectoral partnerships involving VCSE organisations in Devon: the Task & Finish sub-group of Devon County Council's Devon Recovery Group, and the VCSE reference group of Devon-based organisations with an interest in health and wellbeing.

The research was conducted during restrictions due to COVID-19 which meant that substantial numbers of organisations, especially smaller ones, were not functioning as normal, with facilities closed, staff furloughed, and volunteering suspended. This inevitably impacted the range of responses it was possible to include.

6.3 Engagement between the VCSE sector and the University of Exeter

There is a wide range of ways in which VCSE organisations currently interact with the University of Exeter. These can be loosely grouped under the following headings:

6.3.1 Connecting with students

There is huge enthusiasm among students for engaging with VCSE organisations, either as part of their courses through Engaged Learning, or through co-curricular or extra-curricular activity. Student links with VCSE organisations are one of the most widespread ways in which the University of Exeter engages with the sector. Traditionally, proximity has meant student engagement with VCSE organisations based in Exeter has been rather easier than with the rest of Devon. But positive experiences of remote engagement throughout the COVID pandemic have shown that distance need not be the barrier it once was. Some examples include:

- Hosting Engaged Learning opportunities through student placements, including organised, funded routes such as the Professional Pathways Programme, or the Q-Step Centre, or through independently organised arrangements. VCSE organisations have helped pilot the NUS For Good (NUS, n.d.) online platform aimed at providing a digital matching service for students looking for opportunities for dissertation projects or paid placements, and organisations looking to offer placements. The work undertaken by students can range from evaluation of service provision (including economic assessment of social value) to primary fieldwork and research assessing the extent of the need for a particular initiative, to data analysis enabling informed decision making, or work on internal operations.
- Community-based engagement with students as residents of Exeter, perhaps as volunteers. For example, community builders employed through the Wellbeing Exeter VCSE partnership regularly link with student groups and individuals, and support connections with other residents, volunteering projects, and other enrichment activities.
- Pastoral support and input for students and their families. The University of the Third Age (U3A; U3A, n.d.) has a longstanding and varied relationship with the University of Exeter. One of its most successful links has been with the INTO Centre (INTO, n.d.), working with international students and their spouses, who can find themselves isolated, through providing pastoral support and English conversation.
- VCSE organisations also provide valuable input into university teaching and learning: for example, the MA in Food Studies which draws on members of Exeter Community Garden to provide hands-on tuition.

6.3.2 Participation in academic life/collaborative knowledge generation

VCSE organisations play an important role in supporting research work (and conducting their own, with university support), advising on future research plans, and in engaging with the dissemination of academic understanding. This happens in the following ways:

- Facilitating access to particular cohorts within the community for research purposes, either in an ad hoc way, or through more established structures such as patient groups linked to the medical school. This can involve providing a means of seeking the input of specific demographic groups, for example disabled people, older age groups, or users of particular services.
- Consultation on planned research. In the last two years, Devon Community Foundation has been asked to provide a sector perspective on plans for a public health research programme, be a panel member for an engaged grants programme, and provide comment and circulate information on several research activities relating to loneliness and stigma.
- VCSE organisations, especially those who partner regularly with public sector bodies, might link with University of Exeter staff contracted as consultants or evaluators on a larger project, and in this way benefit from the skills and knowledge of the academic partners.
- Attending seminars and workshops held by research centres and departments. These are valuable opportunities to for two-way sharing and discussion, even if their impact may not be immediately evident.
- As recipients of research support grants, such as those of the Wellcome Centre for the Cultures and Environments of Health. This is a rare resource for VCSE organisations – not only a means of conducting funded research, but also one which brings with it a link with the University, and a chance to develop ideas collectively.

6.3.3 Strategic Collaboration

This is the area where the involvement of VCSE sector organisations is perhaps most often overlooked. Our research did not reveal extensive strategic collaboration between University of Exeter and VCSE bodies. But that which does exist is important, and worthy of further investigation.

- A rare example of a formal consultation process at a strategic level involving VCSE stakeholders is the External Members Working Group of the Public Engagement Strategic Advisory Group (PEG). The group involves representatives from a range of public sector and community organisations and is working to develop meaningful ways for PEG to include external voices in its work.
- University staff members as trustees of VCSE organisations. These relationships can be long-standing and mutually rewarding. For example, the geographer Dr Rebecca Sandover is a trustee of Food Exeter, a charity which is working to develop sustainable and accessible food networks across the Exeter area. Rebecca's involvement has not only informed her own work, and strengthened Food Exeter's capacity, but it has enabled a

piece of research, conducted for the organisation by a student, as part of their studies.

- University as convenor of cross-sectoral strategic engagement. Many respondents in our research saw the University as having a unique capacity to act as convenor, bringing together stakeholders from all sectors to address significant issues of common interest. VCSE organisations have an important role to play in these conversations, despite frequent imbalances in the size of the interlocutors.

6.4 Effective University-VCSE engagement

What makes for effective and impactful relationships between VCSE stakeholders and the University? And what can we do to improve them further? This section sets out some essential principles and explores areas that need further work.

6.4.1 Genuine mutual benefit is essential

For genuine partnership to flourish and endure, it must be founded, not in paternalism, or limited transactional connection, but in mutual benefit. All respondents to this research stated this clearly. It would be a mistake to assume that, because of the imbalance in scale between the University and VCSE organisations, the benefit must only run in one direction. Case studies show that this benefit is diverse and substantial, albeit not readily reducible to economic value. A key to finding points of common purpose, where all participants can benefit, is mutual understanding, a thread that underpins a lot of the observations in this section, and the recommendations below.

"We are sometimes contacted to comment on research bids that would directly benefit Exeter University but are in need of external views or validation. Occasionally we decide not to engage unless mutual value is clear."

6.4.2 Communications and Mediation

A strong theme in conversations on this topic was the need for improved mechanisms for initiating and maintaining contact with the University. The practical challenges of engaging carry the risk of limiting the nature and extent of collaboration with VCSE organisations. It is difficult for VCSE organisations to know where in the University to go with their idea or enquiry, and the plethora of schemes and departments is difficult to navigate, and poorly interlinked. Basic information such as documents bringing together information on the range of student placements available, their respective criteria and timeframes, is not available.

University staff said it was similarly difficult to know how to reach out to VCSE organisations, especially the smaller ones, whether that was to disseminate general information, or to seek specialist input. Nor is there an easy way of

finding out which VCSE organisations already have a relationship with the University.

"[There is a] lack of interest from the university in engaging with smaller, less well-funded charities or community groups."

Currently, each organisation is likely to have forged their own route to engagement, researching and contacting likely-sounding academics, or relying on chance meetings or past connections. One result of this is that most successful engagement has come about through personal relationships between individuals and is too reliant on these individual links. If one or other party moves on, the link is broken. More importantly, perhaps, the relationship is often confined to a single set of interests or functions and does not therefore usually broaden to become an institutional connection.

The know-how and perseverance needed to form these connections often derives from previous experience of university structures and cultures. Perhaps staff members had worked there themselves at some point, or possibly had had a career in academia elsewhere and understood its structures and language. There is a serious question about equality of access posed by this finding.

Many interviewees explained how they struggled to 'land' their idea, approach or request with the right person, and some eventually gave up trying. Sometimes this was judged to be because they hadn't explained themselves in a way appropriate to catching the eye of academics. But sometimes they simply hadn't found the right person. This process can be exhausting, disheartening, and, ultimately, not a good use of time, for VCSE staff. One respondent said that an organisation with a similar role in Bristol had much closer links with local universities than her organisation had with the University of Exeter.

"I've tried to push my way in, but I feel I'm pushing at a closed door"

There do not appear to be clear mechanisms for approaching the University at a broader, cross-cutting level. Most respondents explained they would very much value the holistic perspective the university has the potential to bring (at least as much as they would specific specialist input) but have found it very hard to access this. They wanted to be able to engage at a level above an individual academic, often because their concern required a multi-disciplinary approach, and they recognised that academics have very specialist interests, yet couldn't see a way to do this.

6.4.3 University as Multilateral Convenor

There is huge value in the university as a neutral, or at least broadly-based convenor, facilitating spaces for productive conversations and relationship building. There is a dearth of mechanisms fulfilling this function in the county. Views differ as to whether the priority is for accessible, broad-based arenas for connection, idea-sharing, and building relationships, or for more carefully curated contexts bringing together key stakeholders, irrespective of sector, for

focused discussion and collective work. The likelihood is that both are differently valuable.

"There's an absolute lack of places for strategic conversations"

It's helpful to think of university engagement with wider stakeholders, not as a series of bilateral relationships with a central (academic) hub, but as a network of horizontal links between organisations of all sectors, with the university as a closely connected part of this whole. Several respondents highlighted the need to avoid reinventing the wheel in this regard, and pointed to several existing collective fora, which could benefit from university involvement, such as the VCSE social prescribing reference group.

Many respondents noted the hidden costs of collaboration for small organisations. It can be difficult for VCSE staff to fund attendance at networking meetings, especially those 'blue sky' events without a clear, pre-determined purpose. As a result, small funding pots that are explicitly directed at cross-sectoral relationship building are disproportionately impactful (the Wellcome Centre for the Cultures and Environments of Health research support funding is a case in point), and therefore extremely cost-effective. There is clear potential for the University to facilitate a more inclusive and broader-based collaborative environment which maximises the voices and experience that are involved.

6.4.4 Enduring partnerships, rather than ad hoc engagement.

For many VCSE organisations, even productive engagement with parts of the University of Exeter has been short-term, often tightly-defined, and fragmented, involving individual connections with various different parts of the organisation for specific reasons, and a sense of 'starting from scratch' each time, rather than building any cumulative momentum. Despite the substantial goodwill attached to contributing to research, hosting students, etc, this is an inefficient use of time and resource.

"Each time, I have to introduce my organisation all over again."

It was regularly pointed out that, although longer term relationships could take time and effort to establish, this effort was repaid in a partnership that not only had a better chance of enduring beyond a single instance of collaboration, and of surviving changes of personnel, but also was more likely to result in diversification into areas not initially conceived of, thereby expanding its value. One CEO of a VCSE organisation admitted that in the time she spent building understanding with an academic and their department, she could have done the initial piece of work several times over herself. But her interest was in establishing the basis for a longer-term partnership, and for this, it was crucial that each organisation both understood and trusted the other. For her, this was time well spent.

Multi-faceted partnerships can, conversely, be extremely productive for all partners. Devon Community Foundation has been able to build links with

several individuals within the university which are not dependent on specific projects. The result has been that we are asked to contribute to events, advise on research applications, provide a community voice on strategic working groups, and much more.

6.4.5 Collaborative knowledge-production

This research has revealed the huge potential for creative collaborative research projects which draw on the substantial resources of data and expertise within the VCSE in Devon, as well as the research/knowledge-production capacity it contains. This is an exciting prospect, which could unlock valuable academic insights and problem-solving capabilities.

An example might be a recent survey on food insecurity in Devon, commissioned by Devon County Council in collaboration with Devon Community Foundation, and with the potential to be an essential baseline and starting point for further research into experiences of food insecurity in Devon, and the impact of the pandemic on low-income households. University engagement with such a project has the obvious potential to expand the scope and value of this work.

Another example is the work that Essence of Exeter is doing to evaluate the impact of social enterprises in the Exeter area, in particular in relation to the various indicators explored within the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment published annually by Devon's Public Health team. There is clear potential for university involvement in the updating and analysis of relevant datasets, to provide important information to support strategic thinking, especially with relation to preventative healthcare initiatives in the city.

In order for opportunities of this kind to be identified and acted upon, a dynamic model of collaborative knowledge production is necessary. This entails a recognition of the existence and value of externally derived datasets (and work to make them more accessible), but also a careful examination of implicit dichotomies between academy and community. This research has shown that, not only do VCSE organisations in Devon have insight into communities' lived experience, and are repositories of valuable data, but they also have analytical skills and capacity. An approach to collaborative knowledge production and problem solving that blurs the lines between practical and intellectual knowledge, or between 'thinking and doing', has the potential to be genuinely transformative.

6.4.6 Equality of access

Relationships between University and VCSE sector will inevitably involve clear inequalities in size and power. As the dominant partner, it is incumbent on the University to be aware of this, and vigilant in its efforts to mitigate the deleterious effects of such hierarchy. It is therefore very important for the University to consider, not only what engagement with the VCSE sector might

be desirable, but also how that engagement is initiated, conducted, and evaluated, and who is involved.

This report has noted the challenges VCSE organisations can face in engaging successfully with the University of Exeter. Many of these are practical concerns, with practical solutions, but it is important to keep in mind the principle that ought to inform any remedial action. Currently, the operational and financial complexities of engagement inhibit equality of access for those who struggle to navigate them. This is a wasted opportunity for both the excluded organisations, and the university.

6.4.7 VCSE Organisations as Valued Institutions

Respondents in this research have commented that VCSE organisations do not appear to be widely recognised as part of the institutional landscape of the region, and in particular their role as leaders and as employers is frequently overlooked. Given the enthusiasm of Exeter students for working or studying in socially oriented organisations, there is greater potential for including VCSE organisations in careers events. There is clear mutual benefit in enabling Exeter students to pursue fulfilling careers in local VCSE organisations, thereby keeping their skills and energy in Devon after graduation.

In addition, there is (significant, if not ubiquitous) concern that within the university there is a lack of understanding of, and therefore respect for, the professionalism and experience of VCSE organisations. This can in some cases manifest itself in a lack of appropriate safeguards to ensure transparency in managing contracts involving VCSE organisations, and the avoidance of conflicts of interest. Or to a failure to appreciate, for example, the importance of reputation for VCSE organisations. It also speaks to a sense in which the forms of knowledge prevalent within the VCSE sector (applied, situated, etc) are insufficiently understood, recognised and valued within the academy.

6.5 Recommendations for Future Action

Drawing on these research findings, we make some suggestions for action for the University of Exeter which would strengthen their capacity to work more effectively and productively with the VCSE sector in Devon. Many of these recommendations are generalisable to a broader VCSE/university context and could pertain to any university seeking to work more effectively with their local VCSE sector.

- Develop a set of overarching principles for working with VCSE organisations, co-designed with sector representatives, to include broader points such as the need for mutual benefit and respect, as well as operational necessities, such as protocols to protect transparency, avoid conflicts of interest and promote good management practice.

- Establish a single point of contact for VCSE organisations wanting to approach the University, together with communications mechanisms to improve internal coordination.
- Develop a mediation or bridging function, either provided in-house, or co-hosted with an external organisation, to support VCSEs in framing their ideas in ways that are legible to academic departments. The involvement of Research Services staff would be beneficial.
- Establish a small grants scheme for VCSE organisations or academic/VCSE partnerships encouraging ‘blue sky’ collaboration, relationship building and community-based research. This could be managed by the University or distributed via a sector intermediary such as Devon Community Foundation.
- Develop initiatives to link sources of data and other research material within Devon. Work with existing or planned repositories such as the Exeter Data Mill (Exeter City Futures, n.d.) or Devon County Council’s Smarter Devon initiative (Devon County Council, n.d.), as well as individual organisations and archives to improve access to material, but also to advocate for the equal valuing of diverse forms of knowledge.
- Initiate series of ongoing ‘curated spaces’ for conversation, especially strategic conversation, convened by the University, which take account of imbalances in resources, and are sensitive to questions of inclusion and hierarchy. Build these spaces within existing networks and partnerships as far as possible, to avoid duplication and meeting fatigue.
- Consider ways to incentivise building relationships with the VCSE sector among the University’s academics, especially those which facilitate early involvement of these organisations in research design.
- Appoint a VCSE relationships champion within the University’s senior team. A role like this could take forward more ambitious plans, such as developing a secondment scheme for university staff within VCSE organisations, to deepen understanding and build lasting relationships.

6.6. Summary

Although existing VCSE engagement with the University of Exeter is extensive, diverse and impactful, its visibility (and therefore recognition of its value) is limited, often because of the scale and level of formality with which it is conducted. The most effective and productive partnerships between university and VCSE organisations are based on mutual benefit; seek long-term, multi-faceted links rather than ad hoc connection; and situate stakeholders within a network of cross-sectoral engagement, rather than focusing on isolated bilateral relationships.

There are currently significant challenges with relation to the mechanism for communications, accessibility/inclusion, and the extent of understanding between the VCSE sector and the University. Nonetheless, there is huge enthusiasm from both University and VCSE stakeholders for increased and deepened partnership, as well as some clear ideas about how this can be facilitated.

Acknowledgments

Warm thanks to all survey respondents, interview subjects and working group members for their thoughtful responses, and the generosity with which they have given their time. Thanks also to Lindsey Anderson and Andrew Dean from Innovation, Impact and Business team at the University of Exeter for their support.

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7 Final remarks for Communities and Students Together

Mary Griffith., Ed.

Now, has come the time to end the project, but not without pointing to new directions and acknowledging the efforts of each country as well as the support from the EU's ERAMUS+ Programme. I think I speak for all partners when I highlight the many insights we have shared over the past three years. We have adapted to the 'new normal' with COVID restrictions and taken our ZOOM meetings in stride. We are on the other side of BREXIT and want to take a moment to recognise the excellent leadership provided by the Exeter Team as well as the collaboration and time commitment of all partners.

We have produced many unique outputs starting with the state of the art where we began to find common ground among the partners and deepen our understanding of engagement. In our first output, the state-of-the-art review, we explored the concept of Engaged Learning, and the development of this pedagogy globally, with a specific focus on each of the CaST Partner countries: Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Our second output gave us the opportunity to examine existing initiatives in each country bearing witness to the enormous potential of Engaged Learning. The compendium took a more in depth look at one example of Engaged Learning from within each of the six universities represented throughout Europe. Highlighted within the compendium was the diversity and flexibility to be found within Engaged Learning initiatives. The examples provided range rather widely in their structure and intended outcomes. However, the one constant is each initiative's commitment to a concept where reciprocity between the students, universities, and communities, is prioritised.

We then explored how to implement Engaged Learning in our own specific context. The initiatives designed by each of the partners varied immensely, in terms of design, mode of delivery and discipline. Broadly speaking, the objectives of each of the CaST projects were met. In most initiatives, feedback and evaluation demonstrated that students benefitted from the opportunity to engage in and apply their learning to an external context. Students also gained useful transferable skills such as teamwork, leadership, enterprise and project management – all of which will enhance employability. While the benefits for the community partners were not always as tangible, some of the project outputs included apps designed to benefit the external partners, while other partners benefitted from insights, knowledge and increased visibility.

And these partnerships revealed active problem solving, purposeful actions to bring Engaged Learning into our classrooms or better yet to bring the university

into the local community. We worked in Urban Planning and Criminology, in International Relations and Education, in Engineering and Social Sciences and each pilot project brought us closer to understanding implementation from a hands-on perspective. The ten pilot projects presented demonstrate that there are clear benefits to taking an engaged approach. Nevertheless, challenges remain. We learned that Engaged Learning initiatives require more time and resources than traditional courses and sustainability is an issue without additional funding. Success depends upon strong, mutually beneficial relationships, with all partners involved in developing the aims of the initiative and with the expectations of all project partners being explicitly defined from the outset.

The truth is, Engaged Learning is complex, it involves multiple stakeholders, multiple directions and multiple actions and, in the case of CaST, multiple universities in multiple countries. CaST has given us many ways to explore perspectives across Europe and many lessons have been learnt. Personally, I find the differences within each institution a way of understanding how each context works within certain parameters and there continue to be many lessons to be learnt from future EU collaborations. We have pulled information gleaned at the Multiplier Event; we have disseminated the lessons learnt through our toolkit and during several conferences across Europe; and, in this volume, we connect the ‘voices’: from the Higher Educational Institutions, from student perspectives, from our own as faculty/researchers, as well as those from the community. We are well aware of the opportunities that await for new and improved engagement of communities and students together.



There are growing calls for Higher Education Institutions to become more civically engaged and socially relevant in their local regions. The central aim of the Communities and Students Together (CaST) project has been to advance our knowledge and understanding of the myriad forms of Engaged Learning and to develop a deeper understanding of engagement. The project highlighted the diversity and flexibility to be found within Engaged Learning initiatives in each of the participating universities. The examples provided range widely in their structure and intended outcomes. However, the one constant is each initiative's commitment to a concept where reciprocity between the students, universities, and communities, is prioritised.

This volume includes discussions on the practical methodology, pedagogical strategies and approaches of Engaged Learning, as well as perspectives from both higher education institutes and communities, of the benefits of Engaged Learning in different contexts. The authors have chosen the title: 'Voices across Europe'- in order to represent the wide range of stakeholders' perspectives involved in Engaged Learning.

Dr Mary Griffith is a PhD lecturer working with applied linguistics, communication strategies and bilingualism at the Universidad de Málaga, Spain.