

THE PEDAGOGIC APPROACH TO DEVELOPING ACADEMIC RESEARCH SKILLS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: This article deals with pedagogic approaches to developing undergraduate students' academic research skills in higher education. 'Students as researchers' is an active pedagogy emphasising the process of undergraduate research and inquiry which can take place within and beyond the curriculum to develop student knowledge and understanding and in some cases contribute to the broader knowledge base of their discipline. All undergraduate students in all higher education institutions should experience learning through, and about, research and inquiry. In undergraduate research, students learn and are assessed in ways that come as close as possible to the experience of academic staff carrying out their disciplinary research.

Key words: pedagogic approach, academic research skills, students as researchers.

Academic writing plays an essential role as a way to share known information and make a note of new data and research results in the field of higher education and scientific research. "Students as researchers" is an active pedagogy emphasizing the process of undergraduate research and inquiry, which can take place within and beyond the curriculum to develop student's knowledge, understanding and in some cases contribute to the broader knowledge base of their discipline.

Healey and Jenkins argue: "All undergraduate students in all higher education institutions should experience learning through, and about, research and inquiry." For this to be possible it can only occur if the experiences are integrated into the curriculum. [4:3] In 2005, the Council of Undergraduate Research and the National Conference on Undergraduate Research issued a joint statement acknowledging undergraduate research as "the pedagogy for the 21st century" where an inquiry-based model is nurtured within a collaborative enterprise between mentee and mentor. Healey, Flint and Harrington [5] framed the variety of roles, which students take under the broad term 'students as partners'. They proposed four overlapping areas where partnership may occur, including: 'learning teaching and assessment'; 'pedagogic advice and

consultancy'; the 'scholarship of teaching and learning' (where students engage in pedagogic research) and 'subject based research and inquiry'.

'Students as researchers' is an active pedagogy emphasising the process of undergraduate research and inquiry. Undergraduate research in this style may include ways of promoting research-teaching linkages by developing students' appreciation of research in the discipline. It can also involve using teaching and learning approaches which simulate research processes and using assignments which involve research or elements of the research process; giving students first-hand experience of research based consultancy e.g. through live projects; [1] bringing research data into the curriculum for students to manipulate. Staff may wish to place greater emphasis on higher-level thinking skills so that students support their ideas and beliefs with evidence; make critical judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods by examining how others gathered and interpreted data and as a team evaluate the validity and reliability of their conclusions; synthesise and organise ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships; work on projects that require integration of ideas from varied sources. In order to do this, staff will need to create time and space in the curriculum, providing class time for students to work with others on projects, and create assessments that do not require students to memorise facts and ideas. [7] A wealth of examples of 'students as researchers' practice can be found in Healey and Jenkins [4] and Healey, Lannin, Stibbe and Derounian. [6]

A four-fold typology of research-teaching approaches, distinguished on the basis of research focus (i.e. process/content) and the role of students has been widely shared. [5]

These pedagogic approaches are:

- 'research-led' (learning about current research in a discipline),
- 'research-oriented' (developing research skills and techniques),
- 'research-tutored' (engaging in research discussions) and

- ‘research-based’ approaches (undertaking research and inquiry).

This led to the creation of four descriptions of curricula:

- “Research-led: Learning about current research in the discipline. Here the curriculum focus is to ensure that what students learn clearly reflects current and ongoing research in their discipline. This may include research done by staff teaching them.

- Research-tutored: Engaging in research discussions. Here the focus is on students and staff critically discussing research in the discipline as, for example, in many seminar-based courses.

- Research-oriented: Developing research skills and techniques. Here the focus is on developing students’ knowledge of and ability to carry out the research methodologies and methods appropriate to their discipline(s) or profession.

- Research-based: Undertaking research and inquiry. Here the curriculum focus is on ensuring that as much as possible the student learns in research and or inquiry mode”. [5:42]

This is a staff-focused approach and encourages academics to think about their practice and potential alternative approaches.

What constitutes research and research activity can be debated; it differs between disciplines and student research is no exception. Kuh and O’Donnell argue that the deepest engagement in student research happens when students participate in all aspects of the research process, from problem identification to public dissemination. [8] This raises the question of whether students as researchers can be a pedagogy for all students, rather than being selective, particularly when the quality of research will vary widely. There are differing levels of participation in higher education research that students can experience as they take increasing control over the research process.

A further theoretical construct that has had significant impact on thinking about undergraduate research is self-authorship. Baxter-Magolda has argued that

self-authorship is the central goal of higher education in the 21st century. She describes self-authorship as being able to balance external influences with internally-generated beliefs and goals. It is an educational aim which strives to allow students to develop a 14 sense of self through interaction with learning relationships and hinges upon intense reflection so individuals can express how they know something. Self-authorship is a high-level skill that not all students will necessarily attain during their undergraduate education, but a 'students as researchers' pedagogy is an approach that can help to develop this attribute through developing the ability to frame enquiry and to justify opinions and evidence as well as developing a commitment to sharing research findings.

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