Study Circle Project
Session 5 – B005
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STUDYCIRCLE PROJECT

INTERNATIONAL PEER EDUCATION EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE ACTIVE E-LEARNING OF STUDENTS AND THE STUDENT COMMUNITY: NEW PERSPECTIVES AT EDGE HILL UNIVERSITY

Dr. Anna Bussu and Julianne Harlow
AIMS OF PRESENTATION

• To present:
  • An overview of a research project that was undertaken in Italy and Ecuador in 2015/16 the results of which may be transferable to universities in the UK
  • Theoretical underpinnings, aims, phases, processes and results of the research along with limitations and implications for taking the project further
AIMS OF PRESENTATION

• Reflect on best practices to promote 'active learning' and to create and consolidate student’ community through StudyCircle project (Bussu et al., 2016)
PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

• Higher education in challenging times

• Acceptance, belonging & community

• Goals and responsibility of higher education
Revision of life skills model by World Health Organization (WHO, 1993, 1997)

Mental area
- Decision making
- Problem solving
- Critical thinking
- Creative thinking
- Learning to learn

Emotional area
- Empathy
- Managing emotions
- Managing stress

Social Relational Area
- Good communication
- Cooperation
- Conflict resolution
- Accepting differences
- Concern for others
- Interpersonal Skills
- Self-awareness
THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

• The **Peace Circle** is a carefully constructed, intentional dialogic space. The process is rooted in a distinct philosophy intended to enhance human interaction for maximum understanding, empowerment and connection among the participants (Pranis, 2005).

• The Peace Circle welcomes difficult emotions and difficult realities, while maintaining a sense of positive possibilities (Boyes Watson & Pranis, 2010).
PEACEMAKING CIRCLES

CONFLICT CIRCLES Bring together disputing parties to resolve their differences; resolution takes shape through a consensus agreement;

TALKING CIRCLES Allow participants to explore a particular issue/topic from different perspectives to stimulate group reflections and emotions;

COMMUNITY-BUILDING CIRCLES Serve to create bonds and build relationships among a group of people who have a shared interest;

CELEBRATION OR HONORING CIRCLES Bring together a group of people to recognize an individual or a group and to share joy and a sense of accomplishment (Pranis, 2005; Boyes Watson & Pranis, 2010).
PEACE CIRCLE
STUDYCIRCLE’ GOALS

TO TRAIN PEER-MENTORS BY

• Promoting *active learning* (Prince, 2004)
• Developing students’ *life skills* (Bandura, 1995; Srikala, 2010), *empowerment* (Ledwell, 2006) and *self regulation* (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1999)
• Building community amongst students and Faculty (Bringle et al., 1996)

TO FOCUS ON FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS BY-

• Supporting the learning of academic content
• Helping students integrate into the university community
• Fostering globally aware students who are capable of creating new social systems to sustain our future (Botvin & Griffin, 2004)
STUDYCIRCLE PILOT (ITALY) 2014-2015

- **PARTICIPANTS IN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT** (Lewin, 1954)
- 20 motivated second year students (full time and part time)
- One third year student (voluntary facilitator)
- One teacher - coach

**SAMPLE OF MENTORS**

- 12 women
- 8 men
- Age range 20 to 36 years
- Inclusive: One paraplegic student and one autistic student
# PHASES OF THE STUDYCIRCLE PROJECT

## Phase 1: Mentors’ Training
- **Pre and post questionnaires** to gauge participant’s perception of “life-skills”
- **Training on:**
  - i. strategies to promote life skills (i.e effective communication)
  - ii. Restorative practices
  - iii. Active methodologies and strategies to involve first year students
- **Teacher –coach supervision**

## Phase 2: Implementation of mentors’ activities
- **Formation of 7 subgroups** comprising of 3 peer mentors
- **Creation of clubs/group of study and peace circles and other activities** to involve freshers in students community

## Phase 3: Impact Assessment
- **Final questionnaires** to gauge student satisfaction (peer mentors and first year undergraduates)
- **Semi-structured self-administered questionnaires** for peer mentors and 1 tutor (n=21) and first year undergraduates (n=50) to collect Participant feedback on activities/programming;
- **Analysis of students’ outcomes** (Portfolio of participant’s work)
Peer Mentoring to support students and promote student’s insightful experiences
(Hall & Jaugietis, 2011; Huston & Weaver, 2007)
DATA ANALYSIS

• A “Grounded theory" methodology was used to analyse/interpret data (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 1995; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992), in which, according to Charmaz’s (2006) constructivist perspective, the researcher is a "co-constructor of meaning" who tries to avoid constraining the participants’ answers within predefined categories.

• The information gathered during the data collection phase was analyzed according to qualitative content analysis techniques (Denzin & Lincoln; 1994; Patton, 2002).

• An interpretative analysis of the content was conducted (interviews; questionnaires reports; comments and suggestions; spontaneous feedback) of the students (mentors and freshers); spontaneous feedbacks of teachers).
Data analysis The “credibility; transferability; dependability; authenticity; confirmability” research quality criteria proposed by Seale (1999) was respected.

A process of validation against the above criteria was undertaken both during, and after the process of analysis in co-construction with the participants and researchers (Bussu, 2016).

Triangulation Thanks to the variety of the data collected it was possible to make a substantial triangulation (Flick, 1992) which allowed crosschecking of the results obtained from different perspectives with different methodologies.
MAIN RESULTS

1. **High satisfaction levels** of both peer mentors and first year students
2. **Positive impact on academic performance**
3. **Community building**
4. **Development and training of life skills** in a cognitive, socio-relational & interpersonal area
Activities promoted by Peer Mentors

Peace circle

Workshop to involve students community
GROUP IDENTITY AND THE SELF REPRESENTATION OF PEER EDUCATORS
MAIN RESULTS

5. Increased active learning which entails students doing things and thinking about the things they are doing (Bonwell and Eison 1991, 2).

6. Positive impact of innovative technology-enhanced learning on performance and the student community.

7. Promotion of a peace culture at the university.

8. Development of theoretical restorative communication.
DOMINO EFFECT

- Critical Thinking community of students
- Active participation in social and political life of University
- Multiple suggestions offered by students to improve the degree course and to improve students engagement
- To present StudyCircle experiences in other contexts. For example to facilitate culture peace in schools
- Students autonomous decision to create new projects independently of the supervisor

(Bussu et al 2016; Bussu, Veloira and Boyes Watson, in press)
Restorative Communication Model

- Cognitive Area
- Emotional Area
- Social Relational Area

- Self-efficacy

- Critical & Creative Thinking
- Empathy & Managing Emotions

Good communication
Co-operation, Tolerance and Conflict Resolution
Self-Awareness

(Bussu et al 2016; Bussu, Veloira and Boyes Watson, in press)
ELEMENTS OF RESTORATIVE COMMUNICATION

1. Engagement in **GENERATIVE COMMUNICATION** that is introspective, reflective and increases self-awareness;

2. Engagement in **EMOTIONAL COMMUNICATION** to express ones’ feelings effectively and appropriately verbally and nonverbally;

3. Engagement in **EMPATHETIC COMMUNICATION** to listen and understand others and encounter differences without making judgments (Bussu & Quinde Reyes, 2015; Bussu et al., 2015; 2016).

(Bussu et al 2016; Bussu, Veloira and Boyes Watson, in press)
Peace circles can help spread a **culture of peace and resolution in and beyond the university**.

The experience of studycircle generated a chain reaction (domino effect) of active engagement by students who reported that the involvement in the project created a critical group that led to increased participation in the political and social life of the university beyond the project itself. As active learners and owners of the process, students proposed changes to the training process.

The students decided to produce **one video about the project and promotional t-shirts.** The students organised seminars and clubs and invited members of the university to learn about the project.

Students began to bring the practice of the peace circle out into the community. Students began to take lessons from the project and sought to apply them to other degree courses in the university. **Students prepared presentations to share the studycircle model of learning at conferences.**
Impact of Innovative Technology-Enhanced Learning on Performance & the Student Community.

Furthermore, the effectiveness and satisfaction of students in the two different roles: trainers and trainees, was made possible thanks to fast, free and instant communication mediated by technology-enhanced learning.

This result was possible thanks to the adoption of technologies to share information among peer mentors and subsequently peer mentors ability to share the information with first-year students interested in the “StudyCircle” activities. This assisted in maintaining social relationships outside the training college context:

Student quotation
"My experience of using Moodle, WhatsApp, and Facebook has been very positive for “Study Circle”, these participatory channels have indeed enabled a more effective communication for the purpose of project development” (Italian peer mentor).

In particular, students had taken to using each aspect of technology to enhance learning for different purposes: facebook, whatsapp, moodle, you tube.
StudyCircle in Ecuador: Training Peer Mentors

In Ecuador this involved two classes (n=43 & n=38) (2015/2016)
PEER MENTOR ACTIVITIES ON PEACE CULTURE AND LIFE SKILLS
Peer-mentor activities promoting life skills with first year students.

Role playng on life skills

Dramatization on personal motivacion

Role plying on personal motivacion

Leadership

Self-presentation
LOGOS CREATED BY STUDENTS
REFLECTIONS

• The teacher must be positioned as a “teacher-coach” who can facilitate the learning process. This is instrumental in fostering an atmosphere of trust, exploring values, needs and multiple identities.

• The teacher must employ active teaching methods which facilitate the learning process and encourage the co-construction of a space for healthy dialogue to emerge. Such methods play an active role in guiding, building community and facilitating transformative learning.
LIMITATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

1) The training for the action research project in Italy and in Ecuador was facilitated by the same teacher.

2) Some different tools were used in consideration of different students needs, the different educative system, context and facilities (for example, in Ecuador interviews were conducted by peer mentors with first year students before and during the students training).

3) Follow up.
IMPLICATIONS

A project like “Studycircle” can therefore potentially prevent disengagement from the university community (attrition), help students to promote and develop personal life skills and at the same time provide valuable support for first year undergraduates to integrate.

StudyCircle supports equal opportunity in education.

Universities need to ‘think outside the box’ and be willing to employ methods focussing on the agency of students (Bandura, 1987).

• “Studycircle is not a simple project, it is a ‘way of life’ that foster interpersonal relations. I say this because I am autistic, and I had a communication problem, but by attending this training, I learning to overcome it” (Peer Mentor).
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

- (4-6 JULY 2017), MANCHESTER (UK), HEA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2017 GENERATION TEF: TEACHING IN THE SPOTLIGHT. BUSSU A., BOYLES WATSON C. & VELORIA C. STUDYCIRCLE: PEER EDUCATION MODEL TO PROMOTE A RESTORATIVE STUDENT COMMUNITY.


PERSPECTIVES FOR AND NEXT STEPS AT EDGE HILL UNIVERSITY

• Peer mentoring is in place at Edge Hill University
  • Faculty of Health & Social Care (Bostock & Robson, 2015)
  • Faculty of Education (Pye, Williams & Dunne, 2016)
  • Possibly other Faculties

• Need to;
  • Network with colleagues
  • Consider the similarities and differences in approaches used to prepare peer mentors and the processes used in peer mentoring.
  • Consider whether and how the StudyCircle approach might enhance peer mentoring already in place
Experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happens to him.
Aldous Huxley

Any Final Comments or Questions?

Thank You!
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