

Engaging BA Education students in research, enquiry and critical-thinking through research-based learning

Dr Jawiria Naseem, Lecturer

Department of Education and Social Justice, School of Education

Research Based and Research Tutored; Providing the stimulus and a platform for critical thinking about research into labour market inequalities.

In an increasingly globalised world, which requires graduates to adapt to new resources and diverse work environments, as an educator, I feel responsible for developing students' intercultural competence and problem-solving abilities (to mention a few skills only)³².

Integrating research – my own as well as others' – into my teaching has enabled me to build connected and inclusive sessions whereby students are both exposed and engaged in research and enquiry as researchers. Here, I share an example of a seminar session prepared for BA Education students in Year 1.

The topic of the session could not be more appropriate. We were examining labour market inequalities, linking higher education to graduate employability. I designed this session specifically bearing in mind my own research on young minority ethnic people's university-to-work transition in France and the UK. Using my own data – extracts of semi-structured interviews focusing on participants' experiences of finding a first job after graduating – from both countries, I built in the session a small-group activity (10 minutes) which required students to read and analyse the extracts. The aim was to compare the ways in which different participants made sense of their unemployment experiences.

Before the activity, I shared background information on the research project and provided cues as to what students could focus on during their analysis (e.g. words, non-verbal information, national contexts). This was necessary to help contextualise the material. The students started by working individually before sharing their notes in small groups.

As I joined group discussions, I was surprised to see the ways in which some students unpacked intricate elements of the extracts (mirroring in some cases, my own notes). When the activity was over, each table shared their discussion with the rest of the group. I then presented my own analysis of the extracts which created a surge in discussion. The main reason was that some students disagreed with my analysis while others almost questioned the validity of my remarks! This was a very enriching experience, because here I was, listening to students who took ownership of the material with their researcher's hat on, generating new knowledge. I will be honest, in some cases, I was lost for words, and ended up asking myself whether I had been biased in my analysis! Building on our shared ideas, we then worked together to create a list of what the participants required in order to overcome employment barriers; using this as a way to also get students to reflect on their own employability.

What can we take away from this activity? The pedagogical aim for sharing research is to provide a platform for critical thinking through combining research-based and research-tutored strategies. The ability to engage in a cross-country comparison offers opportunities to explore current issues within a global perspective, thus building vital skills (e.g. cultural sensitivity). Furthermore, having the opportunity to discuss their personal experiences and perspectives enables students to see themselves reflected in their learning, thus reinforcing inclusivity.

I appreciate that our own research is not always readily transferable to the modules we teach but it is possible to use data available in relevant literature. Another alternative, which I also implement where possible, is object-based learning whereby students bring an object which reflects a given topic and share the rationale for their choice, thus deploying key research skills (e.g. interrogating the object, conceptualising their thinking). This is a more experiential learning and a personal meaning-making process of the topic. Whatever strategies are used, integrating research into teaching is a fundamental means to position students as participants in their life-long development.

32 Holmes, L. (2013). Competing perspectives on graduate employability: possession, position or process? *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(4), 538-554.