Becoming a global citizen?

Developing community-facing learning in the social sciences

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ABSTRACT

This article will propose a more authentic learning environment for students of the social sciences, one that is not only learner-centred but community-centred. Drawing on the principles of social pedagogy, cultural-based learning, place-based learning and co-production, this article advocates engaging community groups as co-producers in the generation of knowledge, enhancing learning within – and beyond – the university. By not using the community simply as a source of research data or placement opportunities, the curriculum is more likely to produce reflexive graduates better equipped to engage with complex global problems, enhancing their global citizenship and that of the wider community.

KEYWORDS

community, co-production, cultural-based learning, global citizenship, place-based learning, social pedagogy

The question of citizenship has long been a matter of concern for education-
alists. Indeed, education for citizenship is seen as crucial for the development
and maintenance of a healthy, democratic society (Arthur et al. 2008). The
Dearing Report, for instance, aspires for higher education to ‘be part of the
conscience of a democratic society’ with ‘the community, as represented by
the government, [having] a right to expect higher education to be responsive
to the developing needs of society’ (1997: 8). In response to the urgent global
challenges of the twenty-first century – such as the climate emergency, food
insecurity and poverty – global citizenship and education for sustainability
have become increasingly important aspirations in the provision of higher
education in the United Kingdom (Torres 2017). A joint report by the Higher

Education Academy¹ and Quality Assurance Agency noted the importance of ‘equipping students with the knowledge and understanding, skills and attributes needed to work and live in a way that safeguards environmental, social and economic wellbeing, both in the present and for future generations’ (QAA and HEA 2014: 5). Providing students with opportunities to engage in global citizenship, through volunteering, placement activity and study abroad, is attractive for higher education institutions. Indeed, the QAA and HEA argue for ‘place-based learning’ where ‘students work in collaboration with local communities, public sector bodies, businesses and stakeholders to define a problem together, using local knowledge, and jointly devising and implementing solutions that will be locally and culturally acceptable’ (2014: 15).

Global citizenship education became a central component of the 2012 UN Global Education First Initiative (Torres 2017). Educational establishments, as the educators of both citizens and the future workforce, were charged with the responsibility to enable learners ‘to work across social and cultural differences . . . to understand world issues while empowering them with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes desirable for world citizens to face global problems’ (Torres 2017: 16). UNESCO defines global citizenship as ‘a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity. It emphasises political, economic, social and cultural interdependency and interconnectedness between the local, the national and the global’ (2015: 14). To generate this sense of a common humanity, learners need not only to have the opportunities within the curriculum to develop global awareness, but to be exposed to ways of learning that harness ‘the collective dimensions of knowledge’ (Torres 2017: 112) required to engage with the uneven impact of globalisation and climate change. As Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General from 2007 to 2016, stated, education for global citizenship should give ‘us a profound understanding that we are tied together as citizens of the global community, and that our challenges are interconnected’ (Erasmus 2014: 2).

Thinking globally has become increasingly vital in the face of critical issues such as climate change and food insecurity, which Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber (1973) call ‘wicked problems’ (cited in Brown et al. 2010: 3). These problems have complex origins and require a ‘new approach to the conduct of research and to the decision-making based on that research’ (2010: 4). Keeping research within disciplinary boundaries, and within the walls of the university, may help to ‘create the identity that establishes the disciplines and professions as legitimate entities’ (2010: 5) but may serve to

inhibit the innovation and imagination needed to address the wickedness. Solving ‘wicked’ problems may require more than cross-university collaboration or the blurring of academic disciplines into a ‘collective understanding of an issue’; it must also recognise ‘the personal, the local and the strategic, as well as specialised contributions to knowledge’ (2010: 4). Professionals and practitioners, academics and learners, and individuals and communities living with ‘the problem’ are all crucial to finding the solution, for ‘specialised forms of knowledge’ need ‘to be considered alongside non-specialised local knowledge’ (Hordern 2018: 588). This issue poses challenges for academic life, for trans-disciplinarity ‘implies giving up sovereignty over knowledge’ and looking for insight and innovation through valuing ‘the know-how of professionals and laypeople’ (Lawrence 2010: 19). To live up to its promise, education for global citizenship should not only be about student participation but about community empowerment through meaningful and humble interaction with the ‘host’ community, showing respect for the ‘multiple views of the world’ and taking ‘account of diverse forms of evidence’ (Brown 2010: 285). For, even with the best intentions, community engagement can (re)create power relations, with community knowledge being ignored.

Education and citizenship

Whilst the benefits of enhancing global citizenship within higher education have been well documented, these activities often fail to empower the wider community. Community engagement as a route to global citizenship will not be genuine if it does not critique the construct of ‘good citizenship’ – which tends to be exclusive and ignore more marginalised communities. By providing placement opportunities that engage co-productively with ‘local’ knowledge, there is the potential to produce graduates more sensitive and deferential to the needs of communities themselves, whether local or global, and particularly those that are marginalised. Such an approach would support learners, as future practitioners, to adopt more inclusive and empowering praxis, moving beyond the language of place-based learning which often is narrowly conceived as enhancing employment prospects. Instead, place-based learning, by drawing on the principles of social pedagogy, cultural-based learning and co-production, could embrace alternative ideas from communities on the margins – how they experience citizenship – creating learning that is more likely to create ‘relationships for human growth and development’ (Murphy and Joseph 2019: 187). This development of

respect, openness and compassion towards others – what Zlatko Skrbiš (2014) calls ‘competencies’ – is key to becoming a global citizen. Thus, education for national and global citizenship would be better able to address global, national and local problems if it had a closer regard for the voices of those living on the margins of society. Citizenship is not an attribute that a person possesses, dependent on the intellectual capability of the individual to learn. By its very nature, citizenship is about participation. It is evidenced by what individuals are enabled to *do* – enabled psychologically, socially, politically and even economically.

In the face of dominant neoliberal narratives that underplay the role of structural forces in inequality, individuals living with poverty and social disadvantage are framed – and come to frame themselves – as being poor because they are ‘bad citizens’ (Edmiston 2017). Jessica Pykett and colleagues argue that ‘a key part of what citizens do concerns what they are enabled to do, in terms of what they know, what skills they have, their access to material resources and what subject positions are available to them as accepted norms, expectations and virtuous character’ (2010: 527). People from marginalised groups should not be seen simply as objects of study, or groups that need to be ‘helped’ or ‘put right’, their disadvantage stemming from poor choices and ‘bad citizenship’. Instead, education for global citizenship must make visible the many structural antecedents of inequality.

However, the evidence that place-based activities have an impact on either the student in terms of their development into a global citizen, or the host community in relation to sustainability, is less obvious (Bothwell 2017; Duignan 2003; Edwards et al. 2001; Holdsworth and Quinn 2010; Jooste and Heleta 2017; Lasker 2016). Not only is the population of students in higher education a diverse one but their motivations and orientations towards community participation are diverse too. Students may want to contribute to the public good, but some may do so primarily to add to their CV, whilst others may not wish to engage at all (Holdsworth and Quinn 2010). Indeed, motivating students to maintain engagement in extra-curricular activities can be difficult (Sherrington et al. 2008). In addition, students from poorer backgrounds who may have to combine study with paid work, or mature students with caring responsibilities, may be unable to participate. What is more, there can be a tendency to ‘reduce, whether sincerely or cynically, citizenship to “volunteering”’ (Crick 2002: 115) and, as such, volunteering may just amount to ‘personal growth, credentials for career and bragging rights’ (Lasker 2016: 3). Additionally, as Nico Jooste and Savo Heleta (2017) argue,

conceptions of global citizenship in the West have a tendency to neglect the non-Western perspective, often ignoring the voices and values of the Global South. All of this is less likely to lead to the type of learning that moves beyond *experiencing* ‘the world around them’, to producing globally competent ‘citizens who are capable of *questioning* the world around them’ (Thomas 2016: 4; my italics) and grasping the human value of participating as citizens (O’Thomas 2019). As Debbie McVitty (2019) writes, learning should inspire individuals ‘to influence the world for the better . . . and bring creativity and imagination to workplaces and communities’.

Education for global citizenship needs to avoid the danger of Westernisation and cultural homogenisation through the demeaning of local identities (Jooste and Heleta 2017). Indeed, global inequalities and poverty may appear distant to students and disconnected from their own world views. For some students, local citizens living in poverty may also have lived experiences very distant from their own. John Gaventa and Gregory Barrett’s (2010) meta-analysis of 100 citizenship engagement initiatives, across a range of national and social contexts, found that such initiatives worked best when they acknowledged existing social movements and networks. Learning to work with local communities (wherever they may be) could enhance understanding of how we are all implicated in the global political economy and the entrenched problems we share as part of the global community. Whilst the place-based learning may be local, community engagement at a local level can still underpin ‘an understanding of global issues and forces’ (Erasmus 2014: 5). In respect to education for global citizenship, this requires behavioural change, providing students with opportunities ‘to act effectively and responsibly at local, national and global levels for a more peaceful and sustainable world’ (UNESCO 2015: 15).

Indeed, the transformative potential of students getting involved in community activities is not to be ignored. James Evans and colleagues calculated that at University of Manchester that ‘students spend an average of 1500 hours per year studying, of which perhaps half could be directed towards applied research on real world problems with non-academic stakeholders’ (2015: 1). However, to gauge the value of community engagement we need to measure not just the number of hours, but the impact of the activity on the both the student and the community (Hart et al. 2007). This impact could be enhanced if, firstly, a strong relationship between the university and the local community has been established, secondly if that relationship is reflected in the curriculum, thirdly, if community engagement through place-based

learning is a routine part of *doing* social science and, fourthly, if community groups themselves are enabled to play an active role in discussions around the concept of citizenship. This approach has more of a potential to underpin civic renewal, not only building ‘social capital but also active citizenship’ in the wider UK populace (Annette 2005: 334).

Putting the cultural and social into learning

‘The social pedagogue needs to create a relationship with a learner that is as free as possible from the role of being further a “transmitter of power over”; or is at the very least aware of how institutions themselves can transmit power to clients, through structural power relations, which often thwarts or limits human development’.

— David Murphy and Stephen Joseph (2019: 185)

Ideas drawn from social pedagogy and cultural-based learning, because of their focus on reflexivity, cultural agility and inclusive practice, may provide some answers. Social pedagogy denotes a more holistic approach to learning and, indeed, to professional practice. Social pedagogy questions the power relations implicit in defining those ‘in need’ and those providing for those needs. It reframes educators and learners, the researched and researchers, service users and service providers, as part of the ‘same life space’ and as such it is not useful to operate in ‘hierarchical domains’ (Petrie et al. 2005: 22): ‘Social pedagogy is a form of education . . . that carries the notion of community at its core . . . [which] promotes learning in a way which addresses the potential effects of power and inequality on people, groups and communities’ (Murphy and Joseph 2019: 193). While such pedagogical theory originated in youth services, its philosophy of developing professional skills using practical activities as vehicles for honing reflective skills is noteworthy. The focus for social pedagogues is ‘education for social justice’ in which educators ‘affirm, model and sustain socially just learning environments for all participants . . . to offer hope that equitable relations and social structures can be achieved in broader society’ (Adams 2016: 27). Social pedagogy focusses on developing creative and reflective practitioners able to respond to complex social problems. As such, it is not about ‘fitting in’ to current working practices, but about reflecting on those practices and incorporating the lived experience of disadvantaged communities into service design and operation. For if higher education does not challenge the narrative that ‘there

is no alternative to neoliberal capitalist market principles', then creativity to engage in wicked problems will be limited, with education simply 'preparing and socializing the next generation of workers' (Gaya and Brydon-Miller 2017: 34) rather than inspiring leadership capable of designing new futures.

The designers of social science curricula should seek solutions to social problems through 'a collaborative, iterative process of shared learning, rather than distanced and linear' processes (Campbell and Vanderhoven 2016: 12). From this perspective, learning – and research – should take place between the university and the community of interest in a partnership, sharing learning and blurring the lines between 'subject' and 'object' of study. N8, the research partnership between the eight universities in the north of England, states that, 'knowledge of the social world must be deeper and stronger if it is co-produced with actors in that world; research is more likely to effect change if it is owned by people who have a capacity to effect change' (Campbell and Vanderhoven 2016: 10). The implication is that universities should adopt 'an active-learning pedagogical strategy that intentionally integrates service to the local community' (Ibrahim et al. 2016: 258), challenging both 'dichotomous and dualistic' thinking that clouds social reality, and the 'hidden curricula (that) reflect and reproduce larger societal dynamics of power and inequality' (Adams 2016: 28). In other words, this learning environment needs to be challenging, making visible the cultural and social constraints, and dominant political discourses, within which communities operate, be that on the local, regional, national or global level. Otherwise, educators may be patronising the communities they are trying to help, rather than empowering them (Jooste and Heleta 2017).

Like social pedagogy, cultural-based learning is a way of exposing students to the relationship between cultural diversity and social inclusion (Baldwin et al. 2007). It is a reflective approach that starts with the individual student, demanding that they explore their own values and assumptions about 'other' social and cultural groups. Such an approach mirrors the anti-oppressive practice of social work and criminal justice (Dalrymple and Burke 2006), challenging the 'othering' of those who are not White, hetero-normative or male, and those with disabilities or on benefits. But does it work; do practitioners exposed to this learning approach become more inclusive and less judgemental about 'other' communities? In a study of criminal justice students who engaged in a 'service-learning' project in Chester, PA, near Philadelphia, Nancy Hirschinger-Blank and colleagues (2013) found that students frequently started with preconceived ideas about the young people;

that they would be tough to work with because they were psychologically damaged and unwilling to engage. To challenge this preconception, both the students and the young people were encouraged 'to bond in mutually instructive and supportive relationships', with the young people who frequently 'lack supportive relationships' within their own community being provided 'with positive role models' by the students, and 'simultaneously, the youth educat(ing) the students on issues related to at-risk behaviours, delinquency, and inner-city schools and neighbourhoods' (2013: 16). This challenged the students 'to examine their preconceived notions' and their cultural biases, leading to the initial negativity giving 'way to perceptions of smart children who wanted to learn in school or good kids who made mistakes' (2013: 21). However, there were limitations. Attitudes towards the parents of the young people, whom the participants had never met, were less tolerant. Students were likely to demonise parents, rather than acknowledging the impact poverty has on parenting, and many were unlikely to grasp the impact of being a minority ethnic group in a dominant White culture. Self-reflection in the workplace may not be enough to challenge dominant narratives about the aetiology of social inequality.

L. Dee Fink (2003) argues that, if it is to be effective as a teaching tool, community-based learning must take account of the needs of the students, the subject discipline and the teaching strategies of the educator; its success is based on the ability of the curriculum designer to reflect on the needs of all participants. The focus needs to be on more 'realistic learning approaches similar to the professional disciplines of medicine and law' in which the relationship between the learner, the professional, the educator and the user community are all 'critical to the success of the . . . experience for the students' (Flannery and Pragman 2010: 13). If we, as educators, want our graduates to be culturally agile, able to work alongside individuals and communities with dissimilar experiences and from diverse backgrounds in their future lives (whether as practitioners, academics, citizens or service users), *we* need to foster the heterogeneity of world views in the learning environment. This is especially important for students from ethnic minority groups and lower socio-economic groups.² Shirin Housee demands that 'universities teach critical perspectives that expose inequalities in all areas of society and equip students with the academic skills to challenge them' (2018: 3). To do this, we need to 'foster a critical consciousness by which students and teachers see their experiences situated in historical, cultural and social contexts and recognize possibilities for changing oppressive structures'

(Nagda et al. 2003: 168). Such a critical consciousness is pivotal in the social transformation needed to address social problems, and should be instigated through conversations with local and global communities (including diverse communities within the university space). Learning to support global citizenship requires being sensitive and deferential to the needs of the communities themselves. For Karen Smith and colleagues, meaningful placements for social science students need to inspire sensitivity towards others whilst encouraging self-reflection. It is all about ‘learning to be reflective about themselves as employees, while reflecting on the workplace’ (2007: 131). What is more, the opportunity to focus on solving problems as they appear in the real world, through placement activity, leads to deeper learning. Tony Herrington and Jan Herrington call this ‘authentic learning’ (2006: 8).

Co-producing global citizenship

Co-production has become an umbrella term for a variety of theories influencing professional practice across a range of public, voluntary and private contexts (Brandsen et al. 2018; Durose et al. 2017). It is at the centre of a shift away from professionals making decisions *about* what a community needs and towards a sharing of decision-making *with* that community. Co-production is a ‘type of governance innovation that can provide space and opportunity for individuals to contribute where government had previously exercised full control’ (Strokosch 2013: 376). Elinor Ostrom, who developed the term, defines co-production as ‘inputs from individuals who are not “in” the same organization’, and those inputs ‘are transformed into goods and services’ (1996: 1073, cited in Durose et al. 2017: 136). In other words, service providers who embrace co-production place a value on the knowledge of communities they are serving, recognising their knowledge as a form of expertise in its own right. It emerged as a model of service delivery to empower service-using communities, relying less on ‘expert-systems’ telling individuals what they need and relying more on those communities working in partnership with the service providers when seeking solutions to social problems (Booth 2019). For some theorists, it is viewed as having the potential to transform the welfare state (Burgess and Durrant 2018), and to reinvigorate citizenship, challenging social exclusion through the valuing of community knowledge and the sharing of responsibility for developing solutions to local problems (Brandsen et al. 2018; Pestoff et al. 2012). Indeed, the driver of co-production is the belief – and increasing evidence – that solu-

tions to social problems will be more effective and efficient if service-using communities are included in decision-making processes alongside professionals (Aschhoff and Vogel 2018). However, as a policy initiative rather than a legal requirement, its implementation in the United Kingdom is patchy (Steele 2016), as it is hampered by the persistence of paternalistic cultures of working and a lack of professional practice guidelines (Ackerman 2012; Brandsen et al. 2018). Supporting students to work co-productively with local communities could enhance the inclusive practice of future professionals and break down this paternalism.

Without an engagement with diverse social groups – and a recognition of their experiences as citizens – any potential to bring about the social transformation that education for global citizenship implies will be limited. Teaching global citizenship requires students to engage in the ‘real’ world and not a controlled environment. As the University of Sheffield argues, this distinction is ‘rooted in the difference between *telling* students “how it is” and providing “the means to *experience* how it is”’ (Stone 2015: 10). Reflecting this distinction, student engagement should highlight the ‘extent to which citizenship is . . . a contested concept’ (Smith et al. 2008: 138), for citizenship – global and national – is not a universal experience. As Clifford Stevenson and colleagues state, ‘the stigmatisation associated with poverty, unemployment or minority ethnic status can work to undermine these residents’ sense of citizenship. . . . especially where this stigma is reinforced by political rhetoric or by institutional practices’ (2015: 202). Indeed, a strong sense of social identification is key to whether citizens feel able to participate in their communities or not (Antonini et al. 2015). This is because one’s citizenship and social identity does not only come from self-identification but ‘requires validation by others’ and being ‘accepted’ by the wider community (Hopkins 2015: 84–86). Higher education institutions could do more to allow community groups, cognisant of local needs, to have a stronger voice in the design of research, learning and teaching strategies, and inform (future) inclusive professional practice. By engaging communities as co-producers of learning and not simply objects of study, they can provide opportunities for marginalised ‘people to develop and assert a sense of their rights and responsibilities to participate “as part of their community, rather than “simply being governed”’ (Giroux 2010: 1, cited in Thomas 2016: 6). Understanding the needs of the community ‘is an essential condition for co-production’ (Verschuere et al. 2012: 1089). Such a move could ensure that the lived experience of local communities – their expertise – would

be valued as important sources of knowledge. A co-productive learning model could enrich the learning experience of students and their ability to become global – and local – citizens by treating disadvantaged communities as having expertise in their own conditions. In doing so, it would empower these communities to review their lived experience and propose possible solutions to problems that they face. These learning encounters would reach beyond student learning and move towards ‘creating opportunities to make research questions public and a matter of public concern right from the start’ (Wright and Greenwood 2017: 59). After all, community engagement should be ‘strenuous, thoughtful, [and] argumentative’ with higher education institutions ‘taking on wider responsibilities as neighbours and citizens’ (Association of Commonwealth Universities 2001: i). This is particularly pertinent for students of the social sciences, who are likely to work with service-using communities.

By using the body of expertise of the university and the study hours of the student body, and by working closely with local communities, innovative solutions to local and global inequalities are more likely to be imagined. These require ‘pedagogies that gather students and [the] public around an issue’ so as to explore solutions together (Wright and Greenwood 2017: 59). By studying within the community, place-based learning, whether through work placements or voluntary activities, would be more meaningful, exposing students to the lived experience of different communities. In the case of future practitioners who aim to work with those in need, recognising that these communities have important knowledge – a different sort of expertise – is vital in the seeking of social solutions. Students would become more reflexive, which would support the development of more inclusive working practices that recognise and celebrate our common humanity. Such an approach would lead to a reframing of the ‘appropriateness of conventional constructions of the boundaries and nature of what is considered “research”’ (Campbell and Vanderhoven 2016: 7), so that there would be a stronger regard for community priorities in both the curriculum and in research strategies. This would mean that the community would not simply be used as a source of research data or placement opportunities, but as a co-producer of learning and research, with community groups and voluntary organisations acting as partners in the identification of significant gaps in knowledge, or in the co-development of community initiatives that would form the basis of student placements and simultaneously support the work of an organisation. As Brendan Stone argues, ‘truly civically engaged

work is not something which universities do *to* communities, nor even about “doing good” (2015: 9). Rather, it is the recognition that ‘expertise is not just sited in educational institutions, but that local communities, organisations, and citizens also have great expertise and knowledge’ (2015: 9).

Providing opportunities within the local community that expose students to both the lived experience and Indigenous knowledge of those communities – whether that is teaching a diverse group of learners, managing a public sector or voluntary organisation, or working with disadvantaged communities – would not only provide a more rounded learning experience but could also support the development of practitioners who understand the principles and benefits of co-production. And they would do so through their interaction with the range of experts in service-using communities, who, along with students, academics and practitioners, would together find solutions to social problems. What is more, by introducing co-productive practices to social science students, there is the potential to enhance the development of more reflective, creative and empowering working practices of future practitioners, who will work with communities in an empowering way to tackle social exclusion (Schön 1987). By modifying the boundary between the researcher and the researched, learner and ‘learned about’ within the social science curriculum, higher education institutions could extend the impact of education and reinvigorate the citizenship of the wider community.

From learning to practice

According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (2017), social science graduates predominantly find employment in public administration (21.1 per cent), human health and social work activities (19.7 per cent), education (12.8 per cent) and professional, scientific and technical activities (13.1 per cent). Given the nature of the employment of social science graduates, being able to work alongside different communities of people and valuing their experiences is not only an advantage but also a critical necessity for those wishing to bring about social change and enhance citizenship. Placement activity has been a feature of higher education, particularly for vocational courses such as youth work, social work, science and engineering.³ The Teaching Excellence Framework, to drive up standards of teaching and enhance social mobility, has a clear emphasis on ‘career readiness’ as a measure of teaching excellence (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2016) and the need to ensure that graduate skills are ‘better (at)

meeting the needs of employers, business, industry and the professions' to strengthen the economy (Blyth and Cleminson 2016: 8).

There is much research showing that placements, in the main, have a positive impact on the student, particularly in relation to attainment (see, for instance, Jones et al. 2017; and Smith et al. 2007). However, the benefits of placements for developing attributes such as inclusive practice and cultural agility may be more limited.⁴ The student may get experience of the workplace, but the learning may be hollow (Urciuoli 2013), and the host organisation may benefit very little from the placement (Blouin and Perry 2009; Deeley 2010).⁵ However if place-based learning is based on co-production, in which the university, the student and the host organisation work in partnership to co-design a research question or a project activity, as well as the associated assessment task, the knowledge generated would not only meet module learning outcomes but also meet the needs of the organisation. What is more, by supporting students to apply their academic knowledge to a real context, educators would not only create a more authentic 'pedagogical landscape' (Yorke 2010) to be shared with individuals, groups and organisations external to the university, but would also enhance the praxis of future practitioners.

Place-based learning opportunities for social science students should underpin a more reflexive pedagogy that supports the 'development of student attention, emotional balance, empathetic connection, compassion and altruistic behaviour' (Zajonc 2013: 83). Encouraging reflection can lead to 'true understanding' of the subject matter and even that 'precious moment of discovery' (2013: 89). This *discovery* of the subject matter for social science students can only be achieved with at least some immersion in the communities they are studying. What is more, encouraging reflection, through community engagement, is more likely to lead to 'informed citizenry' and 'an intelligent workforce' (2013: 90).

This is what the University of Sheffield calls 'partner-led approaches' in which learning activities 'respond to and emerge from community needs and aspirations' (Stone 2015: 9). Their Engaged Learning Sheffield Project was a space for learners, academics, practitioners and community members to work together to generate knowledge to enrich life for all involved. Documenting their involvement in a range of community-led projects,⁶ they state that co-producing learning required 'negotiating the gaps and alignments between academic theory and the actual practices, ideas, and knowledge found in the world' (2015: 6). It was also a space for learners to gain cultural agility, and to

develop their ability to engage with people from different backgrounds from their own. As one participant stated, it allowed for ‘acknowledgment of different kinds of human experiences with democratic imagination [and] freedom of expression’ (2015: 10). This principle is embedded in Unipartners, in which a group of thirteen universities in The Netherlands formed a non-profit community where staff and students, and external partners, work together as a social enterprise offering ‘high-quality research’ to external organisations at a competitive price.⁷ This initiative provides students with the opportunity to participate in real-time research based in the community, not only providing knowledge that benefits external organisations, but also supporting shared learning between themselves, the university and the local community. Whilst this article does not advocate that employers control or limit the pursuit of knowledge, so that it reflects only the interests of the external organisation, it does argue that the co-production of knowledge between higher education institutions, external partners and learners would support the generation of knowledge that enhances the future learning and practices of *all* involved.

Applying theory to practice: Food for thought

The ‘wicked’ problem of food insecurity is a useful, illustrative case study. According to the United Nations’ Food and Agricultural Organization, food insecurity is ‘a situation that exists when people lack secure access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active, healthy life’ (Food and Agriculture Organization 2000, cited in Sassi 2018: 12). It is estimated that in 2018 just over 9 per cent of the world’s population – approximately 700 million people – experienced severe levels of food insecurity, a situation where people ‘have likely run out of food, experienced hunger and, at the most extreme, gone for days without eating, putting their health and well-being at grave risk’ (Food and Agriculture Organization et al. 2019: 5). In the United Kingdom, 4.7 million people ‘live in severely food insecure homes. This means that their food intake is greatly reduced and children regularly experience physical sensations of hunger’ (Fareshare n.d.). Indeed, ‘socially excluded and marginalized groups are at increased risk of food insecurity, unhealthy diets, malnutrition in all its forms and poor health outcomes’ (Food and Agriculture Organization et al. 2019: 79). The Trussell Trust (2019) reported that 1.6 million three-day emergency food supplies were distributed to people in crisis in United Kingdom by their food banks in the financial year 2018–2019, ‘a 19% increase on the

previous year', such that Steve Iafrati argues that 'food bank sustainability and their capacity to meet demand cannot be taken for granted' (2018: 42). At the same time, 6.5 million tonnes of food are wasted in UK households every year (Clayton n.d.) and 1.9 million tonnes of food are wasted by the food industry every year in the United Kingdom (Fareshare n.d.).

At the First International Food Safety Conference, supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization and the African Union and held in Addis Ababa in February 2019, M. Cristina Tirado-von der Pahlen and Keya Mukherjee pronounced: 'Climate change related impacts are predicted to decrease food production, increase food contamination, and could lead to global food prices rises from 3% to 84% by 2050 . . . contributing to food insecurity and malnutrition' (2019: 1). At the same time, the world's population is set to increase from 7.7 billion to around 8.5 billion people by 2030 and almost 10 billion by 2050, with 'the population of sub-Saharan Africa . . . projected to double by 2050' (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2019). In addition, obesity is on the rise, posing 'health problems throughout the life cycle' (Food and Agriculture Organization et al. 2019: 31), contributing to '4 million deaths globally and . . . increasing the risk of morbidity for people in all age groups' (2019: x). Obesity is particularly prevalent for those individuals 'living in a food-insecure household' in high-income countries, such as the United Kingdom (2019: xvii). The 'wickedness' of food insecurity lies in the complexity of its aetiology. Food insecurity relates to nutrition, biology, climate change, demography, economic, social and political processes, public health and personal well-being. Therefore, solutions must transcend disciplinary boundaries across global, national, regional, local and personal borders as well as across professional and organisational boundaries.

Food is an excellent topic of focus for social science students because it is part of everyday life. Thinking about food is pertinent across the range of the social sciences, and it is useful to learning about globalisation, sustainability, poverty, social disadvantage and social policy. It can be about subsistence, satiation or denial, and is at the centre of most cultural and religious celebrations. Indeed, given the urgency of dealing with the consequences of climate change and population growth, we all need to think seriously about food (Shukla et al. 2019). So, what would community-facing placements look like in practice? I will explore how I have implemented this approach in my own teaching practice through a Level 6 module at the University of Wolverhampton: The Community Link. This is an alternative to the dissertation

module.⁸ Its learning outcomes include ‘a practical understanding of applying a range of analytical concepts and research skills’ and ‘the ability to write up research or other experiential project findings in a report form which is acceptable and useful to an outside organisation’ (Appendix 1). The focus of the report is negotiated at the beginning of the module in a conversation between the student, a representative from the organisation and the lecturer (the project supervisor), so that the research carried out and the final report not only form part of the summative assessment for the student but contribute to the work of the organisation. In the past, students have completed scoping exercises, funding bids and service evaluations. The second part of the assignment is a reflective journal which requires students to reflect on how their learning in the ‘classroom’ has helped them contribute to the placement, and how their placement has helped embed their learning about society. This assessment also requires the student to think about the process of carrying out the research and specifically about their ‘capacity to critically reflect on a range of organisational, interpersonal, researching and analytical skills’ (Appendix 2). They are also required to reflect on the facilitators of and barriers to their research, how they engaged with both service users and service providers in their research, and how the placement has impacted their own learning as well as their development as a future practitioner.

In 2019, one student worked with a local food bank, providing them with the opportunity to engage with a service-user community. The placement was supported by workshops which focussed the learner on the complexity of uneven food distribution and the policy environment affecting it, as well as on looking at the principles of co-production and the importance of the service-user voice in service delivery as part of the range of expertise needed to generate potential solutions (Kotzee 2012) – for a community placement in itself may not be enough for students to appreciate the trans-dimensionality of a social problem (Hirschinger-Blank et al. 2013), or to critique the dominant neoliberal narrative about poverty reflecting poor personal choices (Pemberton et al. 2016). The student carried out research at the food bank, participating in activities such as planning menus with food parcel recipients based on a three-day food parcel; interviewing food parcel recipients to elicit the personal, economic and social issues they faced; and interviewing the paid practitioners and volunteers to get the ‘service provider view’ of the triggers of food insecurity and the personal, economic and social issues they felt that their users face. Most importantly, the student engaged with food bank users in conversations about *their* understanding of food insecurity,

how they *felt* about using the food bank service, and what they felt were possible *solutions*. These tasks supported completion of the two assessments for the module. For this particular student, the report focussed on local food bank usage, evaluating the impact of using a food bank on the personal lives of the food parcel recipients. The report was submitted as the first part of their assessment but was also presented to the organisation, enhancing their understanding of their service users.

The first part of the assessment was submitted in the format requested by the host organisation: an ‘advisory’ report format which identified other types of support the organisation could provide to its clients in addition to the distribution of food parcels. Not only that but, due to the relationships built up through the Community Link module with a number of local, not-for-profit organisations, future projects have already been identified, including one where the focus will be on how the local context of food insecurity is linked to national policies – it will be about understanding the question ‘who is going hungry?’ and be supported by individual case studies that will illustrate the local and personal experience of food insecurity; one consisting of a review of advice services for Universal Credit claimants from the Deaf/deaf community;⁹ and one looking at the experiences of refugees who are designated as having ‘no recourse to public funds’.

The reflective journal, the second part of the assessment, is a key part of learning, and it is ‘the articulation of what has been learned’ (Blackwell et al. 2001, cited in Thompson 2017: 415). In this case, this included the cultural and personal aspects of food, the impact of poverty on individual well-being, and how this personal encounter has impacted on the student intellectually and emotionally. This emotional engagement is key because students without any personal experience of poverty and food insecurity may not be able to sense its pervasive and corrosive impact on individual lives. Poverty can seem as if it happens to ‘other people’, an example of a sociological phenomenon rather than a personal and moral issue. Introducing an element of discomfort in the learning environment can ‘be crucial to “stretching and growing” in learning about difficult social issues’ (Walker and Palacios 2016: 187), what Megan Boler (1999) calls ‘a pedagogy of discomfort’ (cited in Walker and Palacios 2016: 177). Recognising that negative emotions can be a useful pathway to learning, especially when looking at social problems such as poverty, domestic abuse and racism, does not mean that the educator should deliberately provoke discomfort. Rather, it is suggesting that educators encourage students not to be detached from feelings of disgust,

anger or empathy, seeing this as a precursor ‘to hope: to move beyond discomfort to action and to allow ourselves to believe that it could be otherwise’ (Walker and Palacios 2016: 187). This discomfort is much more likely to be transformative (see Green 2018). What is more, in relation to engagement with social problems such as food insecurity, rather than being subject to ‘disciplinary confinement’ (Lawrence 2010: 17), social science graduates can experience the benefits of co-producing possible solutions by drawing on knowledge from across disciplines, communities and organisations.

Conclusion

Higher education institutions – and social science departments in particular – could do more to educate ‘students to be democratic, creative, caring, constructive citizens of a democratic society’ (Harkavy 2006: 5). This requires learning to be more outward-looking, involving place-based experiences which draw on the principles of co-production, cultural-based learning and social pedagogy: learning that respects and engages the knowledge of the wider community. By making visible the structural nature of social inequality and challenging the neoliberal narratives that place the responsibility for social disadvantage on the disadvantaged, this learning model is more likely to confront paternalistic working practices that persist in service-providing organisations. By *not* using the community simply as sources of research data or placement opportunities, a re-framing of the relationship between the university and the community could support reflexive graduates better equipped to engage with those living with social disadvantage, and contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable society. Indeed, in relation to global citizenship, if knowledge about, for example, the pervasiveness of global poverty or food insecurity is generated co-productively, it could make that learning more meaningful for students *and* for the communities themselves, for social research frequently ‘comes too late, too far after the event, to enter effectively into the formation of public opinion about the immediate public concern and what is to be done about it’ (Dewey 2012: 138). Establishing relationships based on working *in* the community not *on* it would generate knowledge that is more likely to strengthen local engagement in social and political life.

The Teaching Excellence Framework, and the development of a Knowledge Excellence Framework, increases the need for meaningful opportunities for students to engage in research activities which are capable of ‘serving

the economy and society for the public, businesses and communities' (Research England n.d.). Students in the social sciences can offer a wealth of time and expertise for local community and voluntary groups. It is not only the case that 'connecting academic study with community service through structured reflection is widely recognised as contributing to learning that is deeper, longer-lasting, and more portable to new situations and circumstances' (Ehrlich 2005: 1), but if there is 'a belief in the . . . [person], in their competence and their resourcefulness' (Petrie et al. 2005: 22) communities can be empowered. By co-producing learning and research activities with local service-providing organisations and community groups, sharing the research findings with those organisations and their service-using communities, the university-community relationship is strengthened. What is more, through a genuine recognition of the knowledge of the community, power differentials between the researcher and the researched can be shifted, with the communities themselves playing a leading role in sowing the seeds of social change. This community-facing curriculum could not only support a deeper understanding of the wicked challenges the world faces, but by *not* disregarding the needs and experiences of those dealing with social challenges and disadvantages it extends education for global citizenship beyond the walls of the university.

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Notes

1. Now Advance HE: www.advance-he.ac.uk.
2. For example, Dickinson Sachs and Schönfeldt-Aultman identify 'hip-hop' as a contested and shifting cultural form', but one proving to be a valuable form of expression for 'students of colour', producing 'its own theories, ideologies, and meanings' that enhanced dialogue in the classroom (2018: 279).
3. See the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2009) *Subject Benchmark Statement: Youth and Community Work*, QAA283, Gloucester: QAA, and The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2016) *Subject Benchmark Statement: Social Work*, QAA1742, Gloucester: QAA.
4. See the work of Pat Green (2018) and her observations of student learning in an accredited volunteering module.
5. See also the article by Simeon Brody (2010).
6. Examples include Architecture students working with community groups to redesign community spaces; staff and students from the Department of Music supporting communities to express themselves with music, and History and English students helping to document material stories of refugees with community artists.
7. Unipartners' website: <https://www.unipartners.nl/en/>.
8. This module is available across a range of social science disciplines and was designed by a colleague, Dr Pat Green, now a Research Fellow, in 1988–1989. Designed to provide practical research skills alongside academic enquiry, it enjoyed success for several years. However, its uptake more recently has been consistently low to non-existent, with no students registering for the module in 2017–2018, and only one in 2018–2019. However, supported by guest speakers from local not-for-profit organisations promoting the benefits of the module to both the student and the community, eight students (four Sociology and four Social Policy) registered on the module in 2019–2020.
9. 'Deaf' is used to describe individuals who identify as people with a strong cultural affinity with other Deaf people whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language (BSL), whilst 'deaf' refers to people who have acquired hearing loss from a variety of causes and may use amplification technology or lip-reading to enhance their communication. See <https://alistapart.com/article/deafnessandtheuserexperience/> (accessed 16 August 2020).

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Appendix 1.

Faculty of Social Sciences: Assessment brief for students

Module code and title	6SA007 Community Link Social Policy	
Assessment type	Report	
Submission method	Electronic	
Assessment limits	6500	
Assessment weighting	50 %	
Assessment brief		
The precise format of the final piece of work is subject to negotiation between student, tutor and organisational contact.		
Assessment criteria <i>(The actual assessment components for this assignment)</i>		
Criteria		Weighting <i>(If applicable)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appropriate and effective report structure• Accessible style and language which is appropriate for the organisational audience for whom the report is intended• Account of research design and implementation• Knowledge and understanding of the context• Evidence of originality and creativity that the student has been able to bring to the project – e.g. dissemination strategy, publicity• Use of supporting evidence where appropriate• Accurate and consistent referencing and provision of accurate bibliography where necessary• Accurate grammar, spelling and punctuation• If not in report format – a written account which provides a rationale (including methods of application and an analysis of success of outcomes) for the chosen format for submission – e.g. video/DVD; photographic display; exhibition; poster presentation, etc.		
	This assessment is testing module learning outcomes	Tick if tested here
LO1	The ability to work with relative autonomy	x
LO2	A practical understanding of applying a range of analytical concepts and research skills	x
LO3	The ability to write up research or other experiential project findings in a report form which is acceptable and useful to an outside organisation	x
LO4	The capacity to critically reflect on a range of organisational, interpersonal, researching and analytical skills	

Appendix 2.

Faculty of Social Sciences – Assessment brief for students

Module code and title	6SA007 Community Link Social Policy	
Assessment type	Reflective learning journal	
Submission method	Electronic	
Assessment limits	3000	
Assessment weighting	50 %	
Assessment brief		
This piece should be a reflection on the research process. The format of the work should be negotiated with the module leader.		
Assessment criteria <i>(The actual assessment components for this assignment)</i>		
Criteria		Weighting <i>(If applicable)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Account of applied project work carried out• Evaluation and reflection on issues, challenges and achievements• Knowledge, understanding and critical reflection on the literature in relation to the topic• Critical evaluation of selected methodologies and reflection on effectiveness• Reflection on personal learning development• Reflection and analysis of organisational and broader policy contexts• Use of supporting evidence where appropriate (relevant appendices, correspondence, web material, etc.)• Accurate referencing and provision of accurate bibliography• Accurate grammar, spelling and punctuation		
	This assessment is testing module learning outcomes	Tick if tested here
LO1	The ability to work with relative autonomy	x
LO2	A practical understanding of applying a range of analytical concepts and research skills	x
LO3	The ability to write up research or other experiential project findings in a report form which is acceptable and useful to an outside organisation	x
LO4	The capacity to critically reflect on a range of organisational, interpersonal, researching and analytical skills	x