

Student as Producer and the Democratisation of Science –

Invited piece by Professor Mike Neary for the 2019 Student Edition of *IMPact: The University of Lincoln Journal of Higher Education Research*

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Student Research

Student research has a credible academic reputation in the Anglophone world, published in student research journals and as presentations of papers at student research conferences. There are a wide range of journals which feature undergraduate and postgraduate research across subject disciplines. Some of these journals are interdisciplinary, while others concentrate on a single subject. Some journals are linked to particular universities, while others source articles from students across the higher education sector. In the US, these journals include: *The American Journal of Undergraduate Research*, established in 2002;¹ *The Harvard Law Review*, first published in 1887 and edited by Barack Obama in 1990;² and, since 2006, the *Columbia Undergraduate Science Journal*.³ In the UK these journals include *Diffusion – the UCLAN Journal for Undergraduate Research*, founded in 2008 at the University of Central Lancashire;⁴ *The Plymouth Student Scientist*, for undergraduate research in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects set up in 2008;⁵ and *The Reinvention Journal for International*

¹ <http://www.ajuronline.org/>.

² <https://harvardlawreview.org/>.

³ <https://cusj.columbia.edu/>.

⁴ <https://www.bcur.org/journals/index.php/Diffusion>.

⁵ <https://www.bcur.org/journals/index.php/TPSS/index>.

Undergraduate Research, established in 2007 at the University of Warwick and now hosted by Warwick University and Monash University in Australia.⁶

As well as student research journals, there are many undergraduate student research conferences taking place in universities as well as at the national level. Most prominent of these conferences are: The National Conference on Undergraduate Research, arranged by the Council for Undergraduate Research in America since 1987;⁷ the British Conference for Undergraduate Research, since 2010;⁸ and the Australasian Conference for Undergraduate Research, which has organised a national conference since 2012.⁹

This special edition of *IMPact* is part of a movement to support and disseminate student academic research. The research papers in this edition are all written by students from the University of Lincoln. Amy Gibbons, a criminology student, has written about her experiences of researching the way in which terrorism impacts on women. Elena Gaschino, another criminology student, is writing about the evaluation of a schools-based student mentoring scheme. Chris Ross, a third-year games computing student, is writing with his supervisor Chris Headleand and Dave Prichard, a member of the Lincoln Academy for Teaching and Learning, about his experiences of PLUS+, a university-based peer-tutoring scheme. Lou Keeler, a Master's student in gender studies, is writing about her experiences as a non-traditional higher education student. All these papers demonstrate the compelling nature of the student standpoint when grounded in research methodology and methods.

Student as Producer

The University of Lincoln has played a pioneering role in establishing the credibility of undergraduate research in the UK and internationally through the concept and practice of Student as Producer (Neary et al. 2015). Student as Producer has, since 2010, been one of the key organising principles for teaching and learning at Lincoln (The University of Lincoln 2018). Student as Producer promotes research-engaged

⁶ https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/iatl/reinvention/.

⁷ <https://www.cur.org/what/events/students/ncur/>.

⁸ <https://www.bcur.org/>.

⁹ <http://www.acur.org.au/>.

teaching across the curricula, where student learning is based on research projects and problem solving, with students working collectively and in collaboration with academics and other students. Research-engaged teaching is different from research-led teaching, which is based on the transmission of knowledge from lecturers to students. Academics at Lincoln are challenged and invited to consider research-engaged teaching as the method for the delivery of their degree programmes. There are many examples of academics and students practising research-engaged teaching at Lincoln, across all subjects and levels of degrees (Neary et al., 2015). Other universities have followed Lincoln's lead: University College London's strategy for research-engaged teaching is called the Connected Curriculum, and Vanderbilt University in the US and the University of British Columbia in Canada have established versions of Student as Producer.

The Undergraduate Research Opportunity Scheme (UROS) was set up at Lincoln to support student research with a bursary for student researchers and a dedicated research supervisor. Originally established at Massachusetts Institute of Technology,¹⁰ there are now many versions of this type of programme at other universities; for example, at Cambridge¹¹ and at Warwick.¹² I worked with Matt Mosey, a second-year social policy student in 2017 on a UROS project: 'Studentification: the impact on residents in an English City'. This article was published in *Geoverse*, another student journal, hosted by Oxford Brookes University¹³

Research and Teaching: Core Activities of the Modern University

Research and Teaching are the core activities of higher education; finding ways to meaningfully connect research and teaching has been a central preoccupation of the modern university.

¹⁰ <http://uaap.mit.edu/research-exploration/urop>.

¹¹ <http://to.eng.cam.ac.uk/teaching/urops/>.

¹² <https://warwick.ac.uk/services/skills/urss/>.

¹³ <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/geoverse/original-papers/studentification--the-impact-on-residents-of-an-english-city/>

The University of Berlin, founded in 1810, made the integration of student research with academic teaching the basis for all its curricula. This was a move away from the dogmatic university of the medieval period towards a university based on the scientific principles of the Enlightenment and the politics of liberal humanism (Welmon, 2015). In the modern European university, students would be involved in producing new knowledge and not just learning what scholars had written.

Research-engaged teaching was substantiated by the work of Ernest Boyer (1928-1995). He was concerned that a focus by faculty on research rather than teaching had a negative impact on the student experience in US universities (Boyer, 1990). Boyer developed a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning based on four scholarly principles: the scholarship of discovery – *research*; the scholarship of integration – *interdisciplinarity*; the scholarship of engagement – *knowledge applied to a wider community*; and the scholarship of teaching – *research and evaluation of one's own teaching* (Boyer, 1990). The Boyer Commission (1998), established in his name, set out to create its own charter for students in the form of an Academic Bill of Rights, which included the commitment for every university to provide opportunities for students to learn through research activities, rather than from the transmission of knowledge by teachers, together with a programme for institutional change that made research based learning the standard student experience.

Students have played a leading role in demanding research-engaged curricula. Student as Producer takes inspiration from understanding students as powerful political actors: 'unruly subjects' (Boren, 2001), with an important role in influencing the progressive development of higher education. In 1968, students in Paris and around the world demanded a more democratic engagement in university governance as well as being directly involved with academics in the production of critical practical knowledge (Neary and Hagyard, 2010; Ross 2004). This movement of students has had long-lasting positive consequences on student involvement in research at the undergraduate level and the democratisation of teaching and learning. In 2010, students in England were not only protesting against fees and cuts but for more involvement in the running of their institutions (Neary, 2020).

Student as Producer agrees with Angela Brew when she maintains that the relationship between teaching and research has profound implications not only for

teaching and learning, but for the meaning and purpose as well as the structure and organisation of higher education:

The relationship between teaching and research is intricately embedded within ideas about what universities do and what they are for. It is fundamental to what is understood as higher learning and to ideas about the nature of the academy. Understanding this relationship raises substantial questions about the roles and responsibilities of higher education institutions, about the nature of academic work, about the kinds of disciplinary knowledge that are developed and by whom, about the way teachers and students relate to each other, about how university spaces are arranged and used, indeed, it raises fundamental questions about the purposes of higher education (Brew, 2006, p.3).

Student as Producer: Critical Social Theory

Student as Producer seeks to find answers to these fundamental questions by grounding its own principles and practice in the critical social theory of the 20th century.

The slogan Student as Producer is taken from the title of a paper, *The Author as Producer* (1934), written by Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), the Marxist intellectual. This paper was written during the Nazification of Europe, the consolidation of Stalin's Soviet Union, the brutal suppression of the workers' revolt in Germany and the Great Financial Crisis in the US. Benjamin asked the question: how do radical intellectuals act in a time of crisis? His work was inspired by the theatrics of Bertolt Brecht and the art of Russian Constructivism. Bertolt Brecht, through his plays and other writings, sought to turn the objects-victims of history into its subjects: the author the writer, the audience the actor and the student the teacher (Neary, 2020). Russian constructivism put art at the service of the revolution through methods of manufacture and fabrication that recognised workers and the objects they made as the subjects of the production process (Gough, 2005). For Brecht and Russian constructivism, revolution was about replacing the capitalist relations of production with communism. The revolutionary project understands the expansive capacity of capitalist valorisation is based on the exploitation of workers and the environment. The revolution demands that capital becomes subordinate to labour (Socialism) until such time as a labour (waged work) can be abolished (Communism). In communism, the social and natural world would be arranged on the basis of human and non-human needs and capacities, with free time replacing waged-work time.

The current political, economic and social context is characterised by crisis, including climate change, species extinction, digitalisation of labour processes making waged-work anachronistic, forced mass movement of populations and the rise of fascism. Unlike the crisis in the 1930s, this moment of crisis is more than an economic, social and political crisis, but appears as an existential crisis for capitalism (Bloom, 2018). Whatever positive aspects capitalism engendered are now being undermined by the devastating negative consequences of a civilisation organised around a market-based model of social development. Any yet, the outcome of crisis is not inevitable. As Rosa Luxemburg, a Marxist intellectual and central figure in the German workers' uprising in the 1920s, put it, '[b]ourgeois society stands at the crossroads, either transition to Socialism or regression into Barbarism' (Luxemburg, 2015, p.18). Motivated by a sense of despair and grief at the damage that has been done to human and non-human life and the planet, and driven by hope as to what can still be nurtured and maintained, new forms of collective action are emerging to confront this existential crisis and prevent further extinction (Somerville, 2019). This includes school children going on strike for climate justice (Marsh, 2019).

Democracy and Science

A key issue for confronting this existential challenge is how we produce knowledge and science, to nurture and maintain the living world as well as giving purpose and meaning to our lives. Normal science, the positivist sciences associated with STEM subjects, are organised as fundamental factors for the continuation of capitalist valorisation: part of the problems they are now seeking to redress, and, therefore, unable to offer any solutions to the on-going crisis. Student as Producer maintains that any solution lies in the greater democratisation of knowledge and science. This means the re-appropriation of the intellectual powers of humanity, scientific and cultural, for the benefit of humanity and the planet. Posing the problem in this way needs to be a part of any debate about the meaning and purpose of higher education. I do not expect all academics, administrators and students to completely agree with the practices and principles of Student as Producer. Student as Producer is not dogmatic. Student as Producer seeks to create dissensus and critical debate about the meaning and purpose of higher education, rather than assume agreement with the 'managementese' that infects academic discourse (Docherty, 2015, p.54). We all have much to learn from each other.

What underpins Student as Producer is the democratisation of science – not only in terms of collaboration between student and teacher, but extended to society as a whole. John Dewey (1859-1952), the socialist philosopher, makes a link between science and democratic society. He argued that the production of knowledge and science is a political act that should have democracy at its core. For Dewey, democracy is essential for effective enquiry. There is a direct and symbiotic link between democracy and experiential and experimental science. Democratic institutions are vital to support public enquiry with the egalitarian production of useful knowledge required for a democratic political society (Westbrook 2005).

Student as Producer and the Co-operative University

As we can see from the papers in this edition of *IMPact*, Student as Producer involves students co-producing research with academics and other students. But Student as Producer goes beyond the practice of knowledge co-production. Co-production is favoured in public management systems involving service users in the provision of facilities, as well as students in their own education (McCulloch, 2009). The concept of co-production does not challenge the social relations of capitalist production, affirming a system it appears to critique. Amy Gibbons, whose paper is featured in this journal, writing about her experience on a UROS project, discusses her research in relation to Student as Producer and captures some of the radical intent that is avoided in official university publications. The radical ambitions of Student as Producer are discussed in previous editions of *IMPact*, Volume 1 number 1 (Bishop, 2018) and Volume 1 number 2 (Pownall, 2018; Pielichaty 2018). Student as Producer supports and maintains co-production but wants to extend these academic relationships by promoting the democratisation of science at the level of society as a whole.

The logic of Student as Producer is to establish a university run democratically by its members for the benefit of society. I am working with other academics, educators, students, administrators and activists to establish a co-operative university, based in Manchester and at other higher education co-operatives across the UK, forming a federated network of autonomous and independent co-operatives. Each of the co-operatives will be teaching and researching a range of academic subjects (Neary and Winn, 2019). The Co-operative University hopes to have degree-awarding

powers in the academic year 2019-2020.¹⁴ The Co-operative University is grounded in the radical customs and traditions of the co-operative movement. One of the founding principles of the co-operative movement is for capital to be subordinate to labour to create new forms of social value; a commonwealth based not on the exploitation of workers and the planet's natural resources, but on the needs and capacities of social individuals.

Walter Benjamin asked radical intellectuals to consider how to act in a time of crisis. Capitalist civilisation is now undergoing an existential crisis. We know from critical social science that the outcome of crisis is not inevitable, that choices can be made; and critical social science understands the power of democratic resistance. For Rosa Luxemburg, the choice was between socialism or barbarism; for Student as Producer, the choice is between 'communism or extinction' (Wark 2019).

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¹⁴ <https://www.co-op.ac.uk/Pages/Category/co-operative-university>.

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