

Sussex
Learning
Network



National Collaborative
Outreach Programme

DOING WIDENING PARTICIPATION WITH, NOT TO, YOUNG PEOPLE

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OUR CONTEXT: SLN:COP

- The Sussex Learning Network (SLN) consortia received OfS funds to run the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP).
- NCOP - outreach to postcodes where young people's HE participation is both low and much lower than expected based on GCSE-level attainment.
- SLN:COP funding has been allocated to universities, colleges, schools and community groups across the region for a broad range of projects supporting NCOP targeted learners – from mentoring to HE champions.
- Tamsin and Emily as seconded academics tasked with SLN:COP Research and Evaluation. Gino as Deputy Head of Widening Participation at Sussex and NCOP project lead.
- NCOP focus on collaboration – prompts us to consider **how** this works and for **who?**

PROVOCATIONS: THE STATE OF WP

1. Despite undoubted successes of moves to 'cast the net wide' to higher education (Hinton-Smith, 2012), persistent inequalities for learners from the poorest backgrounds (Boliver, 2013)
2. Current policy drivers seeking clear answers to 'what works' and for whom fail to recognise the contingency, complexity and vibrancy of young people's 'choice' making and the structural constraints shaping 'opportunity' (Reay, 2013)

'The students are more than just a bit of data to us, aren't they?' (Church School Teacher)



'I think be nice to see a lot more collaboration between the universities to kind of go against the 'them and us', because it is very much the case with some universities. ... working on the connections and relationships that we do have and then it does save on the duplicating then to actually allowing for more people to be reached and interact with - just because we wouldn't be kind of targeting so many people at the same time. But also for the pure fact that we all offer something different. ... So I think if we kind of share what we're saying, the resources, work together more than we already do, I think it would be really beneficial to the message that the students are getting and for the communities in the area that [the universities] are kind of a united front but in it for the kind of fair access for all.'

(Vanessa Stone de Guzman *Redressing the Balance*' WP Stakeholder Research 2017, Sussex Learning Network)

AN IDENTIFIED NEED FOR MORE COLLABORATION IN WP

‘If its only coming from the university’s widening participation team, it’s not enough. If it’s only coming from Uncle Jim, that’s not enough. You know, if it’s only coming from the teacher, that’s not enough, it’s got to be all of those people, working together. That’s the C in NCOP, that’s the emphasis isn’t it? It’s a collaborative approach. Outreach does fail, I think, if it’s too linear, or if it’s too unilateral’.

(Apprenticeships Project Lead)

PUTTING THE ‘C’ IN NCOP

CHALLENGES OF COLLABORATION

- Young people's 'agency' as contested - choice and their choices are inequitable.
- Recognising the load of participation and collaboration for young people and practitioners. Partnership working is not universally good or neutral.
- Broader context of the marketing and recruitment agenda of WP aligns its work as target-driven and competitive, rather than giving space for critique, creativity and collaboration (Harrison and Waller, 2017). *'I think people are so territorial'* (WP Lead)



"My last comment 'appeared' to be inviting feedback.
Do not be fooled."

YOUNG PEOPLE AS COLLABORATORS

‘I’m from a poor estate and I want to go to university. But there are people on rich estates who don’t want to go to university. So, they should be going to school and asking students there if they want to go to university, rather than just looking at their background...it’s quite stereotypical.’ (Year 9 boy, Beachside School)

- Our research asks young people to design their own outreach activities. This is an important step in foregrounding young people’s experiences against a backdrop of complex pathways, choices and insecure futures.
- Our data revealed the complex constellations of young people’s lives and a need for them to be supported to unpack these critically.

EXAMPLE: ACCESS YOUR FUTURE

Overview

An overarching attempt to do widening participation WITH rather than To the audience

Phase one: co-researching

Outreach project in its own right – research skills, prep for university, research mentor

Co-producing questions and research undertaken by students

Half way point, incomplete understanding

However, revealing questions and insights from first school

Phase two: co-designing outreach, based on findings

Phase three: co-delivery

EXAMPLE: ACCESS YOUR FUTURE

Questions

Do you think it is important to go to university?

What opportunities do you think university provides?

How have your opinions about university changed over time?

What are your views of current students?

Do / did you think it would impact your future if you went to university?

EXAMPLE: ACCESS YOUR FUTURE

Themes

Money

How the fear of “crippling debt” is affecting students and their choices for HE

“...it would be too expensive when I can work now and get paid for it”

“The fear of not having enough money is the main factor preventing students from going to higher education”

Cultural

“[As students] joined the same job my [older respondent] noticed [they] had much less common sense and were not capable of completing simple everyday working tasks”

“A participant believed universities were too nice...[she] was worried that ‘safe spaces’ and a politically correct culture would ‘bubble wrap’ their child and make it incapable of living and dealing with the real world”

EXAMPLE: ACCESS YOUR FUTURE

Themes

The future

“[An older respondent] felt [university would] provide them with as much as if they didn’t go...now they feel that going to university unveils a much vaster range of jobs.”

“Not knowing many people who have completed university and gone on to live a good lives is stopping them from knowing whether university is good or not.”

Confidence

“I don’t think I would be able to fit in with people there and make friends.”

“I used to want to go to university and still do, however I have been thrown off slightly and am planning to do something else with my life after discovering the the high grades required which I don’t feel I could ever achieve.”

DOING WITH, NOT TO

- Need to working with young people as active partners in informing, creating and evaluating the direction of effective WP
- Collaboration between academics, practitioners, teachers and young people is challenging and imperfect but politically and practically important.

REFERENCES

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