Enhancing the undergraduate student experience via fund raising partnerships.

An action research project

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Abstract:

This project was developed from practitioner action research and considers the impact of integrating fund-raising activities into the formal curriculum with a target group of undergraduate students. The main aim of this project was to evaluate the impact of developing fund-raising activities as an integral aspect at both module and programme level, grounded within practitioner action research. A core component of this aim was to develop value added structures into established modules to support the student experience and student identity. Furthermore the project sought to broaden, develop and strengthen links with the local wider community recognising the value such interactions can bring. Finally the project set out to develop integration opportunities between the students and organisations in order to develop the students' awareness of workforce options as future professionals. This study is based within one post-1992 Higher Education Institution (HEI) and consisted of three inter-related but distinct phases. The project involved 60 students during phase one building to some 200 students by phase three. The findings suggest fund-raising activities built into the formal curriculum can be a useful medium for promoting student identity whilst providing a 'value-added' component to existing programmes of study.

Enhancing the undergraduate student experience via fund raising partnerships. An action research project

Rationale for the project

Whilst the focus of this project was not aligned to student retention, the project team recognises that within the UK, there is concern surrounding the numbers of students who withdraw early from HE programmes of study in relation to retention and funding for the institution (see for example Yorke and Longdon, 2004; Tinto , 2005; Thomas 2010; Thomas and Jamieson-Ball 2011) . Student withdrawal from programmes of study directly impacts upon HE funding at a time when HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) funding is reducing. This means that HEIs rely upon positive student feedback in order to continue to operate in an increasingly competitive market-place (as highlighted within the Higher Education Academy Resource Centre- Retention and Success: What Works Workshop programme; Academy Exchange, 2007 and annual National Student Survey indicators). The focus of this project therefore is more readily aligned to promoting the student experience. Whilst changes to pedagogical practice can contribute to student engagement and experience it is also important to offer enhancement opportunities (see for example Zepke, 2005). Enhancement opportunities can promote integration and adaptation as a value added component promoting social participation. Social participation has been defined as individuals taking part in decision making processes in environments that affect them (Heller et al. 1984; Wandersman and Florin 2000). Cicognani *et al*. (2008 p.4) maintain that

> *"Social participation takes place within a community context, where people engage in many formal and informal social networks. Forms of participation*

are determined by issues arising within a community, a place, and include its culture, norms, values, institutions."

Therefore social participation is dependent on student motivation and expectation, not dissimilar to Bourdieu's suggestion of the relationship between habitus and capital: including institutional, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986, Grenfell, 2004), Holdsworth (2010) found that students' motivation changes over time as a result of 'volunteerism' and, for many, they did not volunteer to enhance their curriculum vitae or to do good; suggesting social participation can be a motivator within 'volunteerism'. With this in mind the project team reflected upon the opportunities 'volunteerism' could provide for enhancing the student experience.

'Student experience' has become an embracing term to identify many aspects of a student's university life; however, as The 1994 Group report stated, " '*Student Experience' is a wide-ranging term meaning different things to different kinds of students'"* (2007, p.4). The diversity of students is broad, from 18 year old school leavers to mature adults and from local, national or international regions; making comparisons across this diversity difficult (see for example Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Thomas, 2002; Holdsworth, 2010). All of these students encounter a variety of experiences and have individual expectations of university life, often based upon their own previous experiences; and as Bourdieu (1986, 1990, 1993, 2001) highlights [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice, a modus operandi that arguably applies to both formal and informal experience. How the modern student's role can be understood is summarised in The 1994 Group's Executive Summary as " *...Learner, Citizen, Colleague, Consumer, Scholar, Ambassador: but perhaps the most important role of all is Partner*." (2007, p.4). With these roles in mind it is suggested that enhancing the

quality of any or all of these experiences can only improve the standing of an institution from a student perspective, therefore the overall student experience is important (Bekhradnia, 2012).

Student enhancement can be seen in a variety of ways, Cahill *et al*. (2010) analysed it from the academics' perspective. Such a concept was viewed as 'multi-faceted'

> *"At a basic level, quality enhancement was described as 'making things better' and being responsive and having added value', and was principally linked to learning and teaching. On another level, quality enhancement was viewed as improving the total or broad experience of the student and engaging effectively with students, staff, outside agencies and departments within the university as a whole..." (Cahill et al, 2010 p.286 – 287)*

At university level, Trotter (2004) asserts that a strategic plan for enrichment opportunities might offer routes to enhance the student experience; recognising the need to support students as they make the transition into the sometimes bewildering and often lonely start at university (from mainstream schools, or colleges, or employment). Transition into Higher Education, both academic and social, is complex as Severiens and Schmidt (2009) have noted:

> *"those who feel at home, who take part in extra-curricular activities, and who feel connected with fellow students and teachers, are more inclined to persist with their studies. Without social integration, it is more difficult to persist, and ultimately to graduate" (p. 60)*

This suggests there is a need to bring together students via the holistic student experience, including those prone to working alone and those who do not socialise with other students *(ibid*.). The student experience is a fundamental component of social integration, a debate not lost on Halsay *et al* (1997) when considering notions of, and development of, capital. In addition to ensuring the student experience is positive, the number of students attending university has risen over the past four

decades. Although the numbers have risen alongside widening participation, Galindo-Rueda *et al*. (2004) found that between 1994 and 2002 the gap had widened between student numbers from higher socio-economic groups and lower SES (Socio-Economic Status) groups. Jones and Watson (1990) identified non-traditional students as those who arrived in Higher Education as a consequence of societal change. These students therefore could include those from minority groups, low socio-economic levels and older members of society; providing a wide array of variables and individual needs that need to be reflected within any enhancement opportunities such as volunteering. Cherkin *et al* (2009) found those students in the United States who had high levels of parental support were more likely to engage in extra-curricular activities and support volunteering; highlighting a range of characteristics resonate with Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) assessment of capital ownership. This suggests the family's habitus and individual social and cultural capital play an important role in determining whether to participate in volunteering activities, a factor not lost on Cherkin *et al.* (2011). Reflecting upon such indicators led the project team to recognise that the fund-raising activities could potentially have a higher level of impact or success if friends and family, where feasible, were able to participate.

Problem analysis

Developed from a practitioner action research approach, this study is based within one post-1992 Higher Education Institution (HEI), without funding or sponsorship. The impetus for this project evolved from combining the nature of specific modules with student alternative activities. Historically students across a number of HEIs do engage with 'volunteerism' via a range of fund-raising events. Furthermore projects involving International projects are popular amongst young people (see for example

International Student Volunteers Organisation). With reference to problem analysis this study was developed from reflection of student behaviour, in that it had been noted many students attended for specific teaching periods only and left immediately following that input. Whilst this had not been formally identified as problematic and based upon their own reflections of being a student, the project leader felt that offering additional activities linked to fund-raising may enhance the student experience overall. From this reflection the main aim (and research question) for this study was identified to investigate the impact of fund-raising activities as an integral aspect at both module and programme level, founded upon practitioner action research. This was supported through the following research objectives:

1. Can fund-raising activities developed as enhancement opportunities provide value added components into established modules?
2. Can fund-raising activities broaden, develop and strengthen links with the local wider community?
3. Can fund-raising activities developed as an integral aspect of the module or programme develop opportunities between the student and the institution?

This project brings together fund-raising activities integrated within the formal teaching curriculum. Such activities offered students the opportunity to undertake new experiences as part of a series of fund-raising activities. The project employs the same approach adopted by many organisations, such as the Children's Society, in seeking to raise funds by offering activities or experiences 'free of charge' via target sponsorship amounts raised.

It had also been noticed that students did not readily know one another beyond small sub-groups; however, such indicators are not unique to this institution and feelings of integration or isolation in Post-1992 Universities are highlighted by Read *et al* (2003) within their commentary regarding student experience. For this reason the project leader felt it may be beneficial to encourage more interaction: between students, across sub-groups, across seminar cohorts and within whole year cohorts via fund-raising activities. It was also felt that such student interaction could support students in promoting their individual habitus and capital, as proposed by Bourdieu (1984 and 1985). In addition the project sought to broaden, develop and strengthen links with the local wider community recognising the value such interactions can bring (see for example Bourdieu 1984, Bourdieu and Passeron, 2000).

Methodological approach.

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the impact of developing fund-raising activities as an integral aspect at both module and programme level, grounded within practitioner action research. This study employs the action research model first developed by Lewin (1946) which incorporated an understanding of group dynamics and the relationships between individuals, groups, and communities. Some approaches to participatory action research have also adopted a critical pedagogy espoused by Friere (2000). In this way the project follows the process of planning, action, observing and reflecting as a cyclical process (Norton, 2009; McNiff, 2010). Action researchers are quite explicit in their responsibility to do work that is socially meaningful and socially responsible. McNiff (2010, p. 7) maintains that

> *"Action researchers always see themselves as associated with the issue they are interested in. They investigate the issue from a values-committed perspective, and they check their findings against the critical feedback of others."*

Action researchers help transform inquiry and such action is practical, reflective and pragmatic. More importantly action research is directed to solving problems or making change (Gray, 2009) and with reference to this project it is the 'change' aspect that is interrogated. Yet, this research approach is sometimes criticised by positivist social researchers and interpretivists. Positivists maintain that action research cannot discover phenomena that are subject to natural laws because the phenomena has not been conducted through empirical testing, using inductive and deductive hypotheses (Gray, 2009). In contrast, interpretivists believe in a socially constructed subjectively-based reality that is influenced by culture and history (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2009). Lather (1986) maintains that though action research shares some characteristics of the interpretive paradigm, neither the interpretive nor positivist paradigm are adequate structures under which to place action research. If accepting knowledge is derived from practice, and that practice is informed by knowledge, such debate then becomes central to action researchers (see for example McNiff and Whitehead, 2006; Whitehead and McNiff, 2006; Nofke and Somekh, 2009; Norton, 2009; Sumara and Davis, 2009; Mandell, 2010; May, 2011); however this position is not shared by all those involved (see for example Gray, 2009). Alongside this, there is no researcher neutrality during this process due to the 'active' input of action researchers in resolving a problematic situation or bringing about change (Mandell, 2010).

Research procedure:

The action plan was founded upon the belief that providing 'enhancement' opportunities could enhance the student experience overall (Grenfell *et* al, 1998; James, 2000; Grenfell and James, 2004). The main aim of this project was to evaluate the impact of fund-raising activities as an integral aspect of both module and programme via practitioner action research. This was considered by reflecting upon the underpinning research questions:

1. Can fund-raising activities developed as enhancement opportunities provide value added components into established modules?
2. Can fund-raising activities broaden, develop and strengthen links with the local wider community?
3. Can fund-raising activities developed as an integral aspect of the module or programme develop opportunities between the student and the institution?

With these targets in mind the project leader took responsibility in the first instance, developing fundraising activities and inviting students to participate as an optional choice within two strand modules. This enabled a pilot project to be conducted. The process of enquiry stemmed from Lewin's model of action research and reflected the distinctive features outlined by Zuber-Skerritt (1992); in so much as the project encouraged a critical collaborative enquiry based upon reflective practice (see also Kemmis and McTaggart, 1992; Reason and Bradbury, 2001; Costello, 2003; Somekh, 2006; Nofke and Somekh, 2009; Somekh and Zeicher, 2009). In this way the project was based upon self-evaluation, participative problem solving and continued professional development (Schon, 1987). The 'Action Research' process transpired

through 3 progressive phases that built upon the observation and reflection/ review of each phase, as follows:

Phase 1: During the pilot phase 2nd and 3rd year undergraduates undertaking Family and Community specialism strand option modules, delivered by the project leader, participated. This involved some 60 students and lasted one semester. From commencement the students engaged with the activities which developed week on week. Feedback for the pilot was collected via group discussion whereby students were invited to participate through the following means: remaining after the scheduled taught session on two targeted dates or by adding commentary to a social medium blog regarding participation in, experience of and continuation for the activities devised. The bias contained in such data reflects the sample being only those participating in the fund-raising activities and only those willing to participate in providing feedback suggestive of an opportunistic sample/ self-selective sample. The sample was not drawn from all students on the programme rather only those directly involved in the 'change' aspect. Whilst structured questions were initially posed exploration of answers was possible due to the nature of the discussion forums. The three members of the teaching team involved in the project overall provided reflective accounts of development and implementation of the project that enabled wider dissemination to be explored. However it could be argued the reflection of these members of the teaching team contains self-interest bias, in that they had promoted this project from conception. Conversely, it was evident during the pilot phase that the project had much wider appeal than had been anticipated, with interest shown from a range of students via word of mouth; a development that the project team had not

anticipated would happen so soon into the project. Reflection of outcomes from Phase 1, alongside a direct request from other students enabled a 2nd phase to evolve

Phase 2 was possible because the students commenced a core module for all 2nd year students delivered by the project leader. This expanded the number of students involved from 60 to 125 and provided a timely opportunity to further interrogate indicators suggesting the project had been successful (Greenwood, 1994; Greenwood and Morton, 1998; Gray, 2007). Such cyclical processes within action research enable the research to continue; allowing for development, expansion and refinement. Feedback for this phase was collected via questionnaire and group discussion. The project team accept such methods continue to include participant bias, by recording the responses of those students participating in the activities rather than all students across the programme, however it was felt that the student voice was imperative to any continuation or development of the project prior to such development. Students were invited to participate in discussion through the following means: remaining after the scheduled taught session on two targeted dates or by adding commentary to a social medium blog regarding participation in, experience of and continuation for fund-raising activities. Whilst structured questions were initially posed, exploration of answers was possible due to the nature of the discussion forums.

Questionnaires were handed out at the commencement of scheduled seminar group sessions to all attending students. At the end of the session students were asked to leave their questionnaire in the envelope provided as they left. This enabled maximum return for questionnaire response. During Phase 2 the activities were opened to the community with events such as a 'Zumba'thon; this enabled the participating team

members to reflect upon organisation and development of community ventures for expanding the project further. Whilst predominantly developed within the core module, students and Childhood Studies teaching team members participated in one off events such as a Sponsored walk enabling exploration and reflection upon the potential to move into Phase 3 and open the project up as a programme project more readily.

Phase 3: The project continued into a 3rd phase as students entered the new academic year, and involved all students on the programme as an important step towards encouraging collaborative practice for incoming 'Freshers' (Lumsdon *et al*, 2010). It was at this time the development of a teaching team/ student fund-raising group was established to help identify, co-ordinate and organise events. This phase enabled a wider review of establishing fund-raising activities as an integral component of the programme for the future and during this phase all of the Childhood Studies teaching team participated with the project. To establish the value of such partnerships and impact participant observations, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were employed. This phase involved fifty 3rd year students, eighty 2nd year students and sixty 1stYear students. Questionnaires were handed out during scheduled lecture periods, students were then asked to complete the questionnaire and leave in the dropbox provided at the lecture theatre exit. This helped to support anonymity within the replies. Circulating the questionnaire during scheduled lecture slots accommodating the whole year group cohort promoted return rate responses. This proved to be an effective means of generating questionnaire responses as the lecture slots targeted were key lecture sessions for students, with a full attendance on the day; this then led to a 100% return rate with all students completing their questionnaire

prior to leaving the lecture theatre (correlation was made between number of responses and number of attendees at lecture slot). Alongside this semi structured interviews were gathered from year group representatives involving twenty-four 1st years, twenty-six 2nd years and twenty 3rd years: all of whom indicated they wished to take part in the interview process. Using social media forums students were asked if they would be interviewees for the fund raising activities with a date and time specified. All those indicating they would like to take part and were able to attend were invited. The bias contained in such sampling relate to those students who volunteered and consented to participate. It could be argued that only those students who were in favour of the project volunteered. The project team recognised such bias and balanced this against the questionnaire data gathered during the lecture periods. The interview groups facilitated the collection of more in-depth qualitative data capitalised upon the synergy which occurred between group members (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; Freebody, 2003; Cohen *et al.* 2005; Arthur, 2012; Bryman, 2012). When this is developed *"a momentum generated which allows underlying opinions, meanings, feelings attitudes to emerge alongside descriptions of individual experiences"* (Parker & Tritter, 2006, p. 26), helping to establish the reliability and validity of the data generated (Burker and Luckmann, 1966; Burgess, 1984; Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Carr and Kemmis, 2005; May, 2011). Alongside student feedback monthly team meetings provided opportunity to include discussion of progress and reflection about the project during phase 3 between the teaching team members.

FINDINGS

Action Research Cycle One: plan, act, observe and reflect

During the pilot phase activities ranged from small weekly aspects that contributed £10-£15 per week to larger one off activities such as a sponsored walk, which generated over £500. The charitable organisations that benefited were selected by students from those based within the locality. It was important that funds raised were directed to the local area to enable students to 'see' the results of their efforts. In this way the activities provided direct links between the students, their studies and wider community. Upon completion of this phase feedback was generated via group discussion to investigate student opinion. Students point to informal learning and a sense of partnership as an important aspect noting:

"It helped me to learn about what charities do and what happens around here… I knew Barnardos existed but didn't know about the Children's Society and they do a lot for children that I never knew about, but it also helped me to understand the module stuff better as well" (Student 1)

"The weekly fund-raising, it surprised me how much this made and it helped me understand the module better" (Student Year 2)

"Nibbles- I loved coming in for the nibbles and to see what had been made… amazing cup cakes and great fun the way we all worked together and tried to do the 'best' ones" (Student year 3)

This reflects Hughes (2009) who indicated the need to recognise that learning can occur in different social contexts. Other students noted potential employment opportunities*: "I didn't realise that I could work for one of the charities once I graduated, but the work that they do is the work I want to do as a professional so this has helped me to find out more for later on and how important charities can be for children and families…."* (Student 2). Such comments point to associated student benefits that reflect wider opportunities for future graduates. Whilst this phase involved only 3 members of the overall teaching team it was evident to those involved that students were enthusiastic and interested in the pilot project. The student response and practitioner reflections were discussed at the next Childhood Studies team

meeting, with a recommendation for opening the project up further across all 2nd year students via an upcoming core module.

Action Research Cycle 2: revised plan, action, observation, reflection

During this phase students began to take ownership of the project and suggested two specific activities they wished to develop. The first was a community based 'Zumba' class, which would be led by a student qualified to run such classes. This was very successful and engaged over 60 members of the community with associated media coverage. Following this a 'spooky sleepover' was also requested and organised between the project leader and students at Castle Keep, Newcastle upon Tyne, again reported in local media, which appeared to impact positively upon student identity with the programme as confirmed within student feedback. From data generated all students, completing the questionnaire, agreed that having fund-raising activities linked within modules was a good idea and that it helped them to develop a sense of identity at module and programme level. Of greater interest to the team were student indications that fund raising activities linked directly to modules helped develop their knowledge and understanding. Group discussion provided exploration of this finding and noted: "*We talk a lot about poverty and things that affect children, but by doing the fund raising and going out there to see where the money goes, lets you see what all the teaching is about and you get to meet children so it helps you understand the reality"* (Student 3). This suggested by 'bringing' together rhetoric and reality students were able to make distinctive links between key issues that they previously indicated were difficult and 'fuzzy'. Such comments implied bringing 'out there' to 'in here' was a valuable added benefit and resonates with questionnaire response. Within questionnaire responses all students either agreed or strongly agreed that

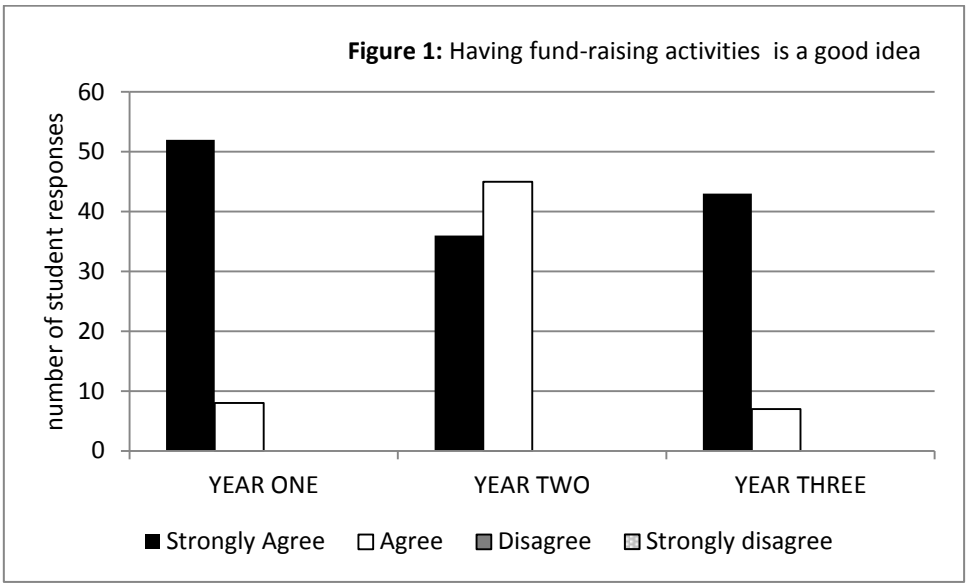
‘Enhancement activities develop students’ knowledge and understanding’ and that ‘I believe experiences do help to raise awareness of key issues.

With regard to student self-concept those partaking acknowledged project participation had enabled them to develop their self-confidence and provided opportunities for them to undertake events they would not normally have engaged with- such as participating in a ‘spooky sleepover’. All students indicated that they would recommend the activities continued and be opened up to more students as a link to, and engaging, with the wider community. The project team discussed student feedback at the next Childhood Studies Team meeting. What was noted during this meeting was the number of emails the project leader received from students not directly involved, requesting involvement; some of which were from students on alternative programmes across the university. This suggested to the team that the project did have wider appeal and was continuing to generate interest and potential for a whole programme approach.

Action Research Cycle 3: revised plan, action, observation, reflection.

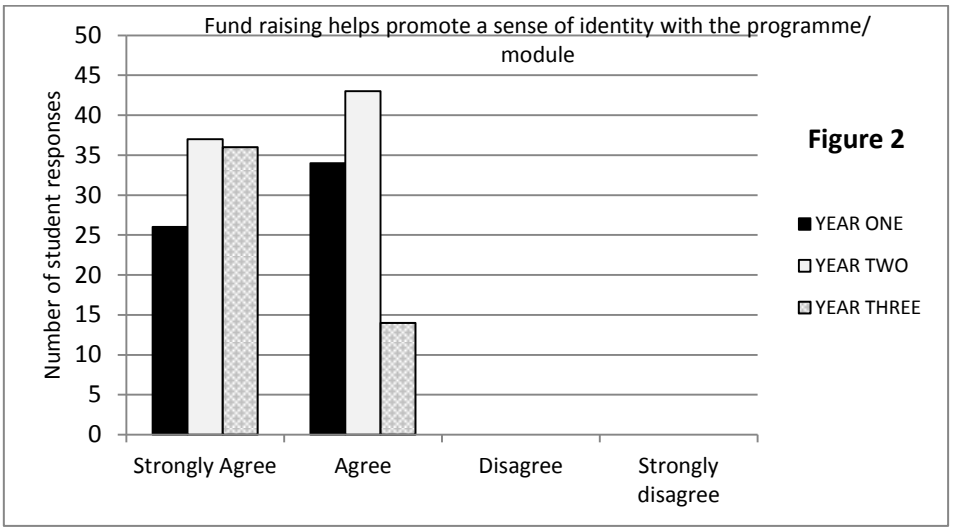
During this phase students engaged in a sponsored walk, Mini-Olympics, a ski-athon with a local skiing club, bake sales, zip-wire and a Christmas Fayre. Although the teaching team involved agreed that fund raising activities were a good idea, it was important to identify if this was also a viewpoint of students if the project was to be successful. Questionnaire responses indicated that all students either agreed or strongly agreed that the activities were a good idea as outlined within figure 1.

Figure 1



The data generated allowed the team to reflect upon the main aim of this project and the components of the project. The Childhood Studies Team noted that students did appear to have a stronger sense of identity with at a module and programme level as a result of the project. This was determined by student comments made to several members of the team with regard to the module itself or the programme. In addition student feedback for modules in which the project was embedded indicated favourable results. This feedback is evidenced within the quality indicators collected and collated for the institution and suggests that the project was successful in enhancing the student experience. However such feedback generated by the institution for the module itself, or National Student Survey results for the programme, do not include specific mention of the fund-raising activities project. Alternatively interview and questionnaire responses from the students specifically relating to the fund-raising activities suggested that there is a positive impact between fund-raising activities and sense of identity as outlined in figure 2.

Figure 2



These findings were supported by students within interviews as follows:

"before we did the fund raising I would just come in and not really get involved in the class stuff, then just go home now I stay and join in things more and I get more involved in class cos I know people better but mainly from just getting involved it's been good for me to do this" (Student 4)

"I'm really proud of what we do and being part of this it makes me feel much more like I belong even though I'm a 3rd year- much more than I did in the other years- I just wish we did this earlier say in the 1st year" (Student 5)

"The main reason I think we should keep this is that we do more together as a group and as a programme, but for me it was being able to take my children to events rather than missing out so I got to meet loads more students this year" (Student 6- final year)

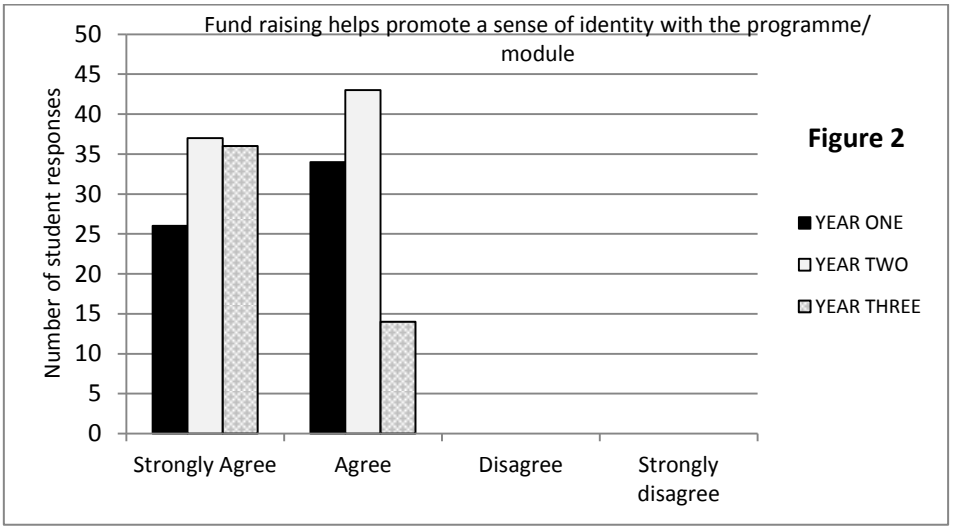
In addition the project sought to broaden, develop and strengthen links with the local wider community. This was achieved as noted previously when students put forward the project brought 'out there' 'in here', and consolidated previous links with the organisations involved by making a real impact within the community. This direct impact allowed students to recognise the difference their efforts made and supported the reflections of the project team. The project team noted students were more actively discussing and investigating the communities in which they lived, and how their studies related to such areas but more importantly that they were making a

difference to their communities; whilst recognising this may be on a small scale. Students indicated that being able to see what difference their fund-raising had made was important to them:

"*it's not like when you do stuff on the tele – you know like Pudsey bear n that so you don't really know what your money does..like they show you what the money does sort of overall but this shows us what it does exactly and how much it cost so I know exactly what my money did to help so it's better"* (Student 1)

This was further supported during questionnaires as outlined in Figure 3. Only one student from the 2nd year disagreed, however this student went onto to make a note alongside her response to indicate it would be "*even better if we could have more placement experiences in the places we support"* (Student 7)

Figure 3



Finally the project set out to develop integration opportunities between the students and organisations in order to promote awareness of employability options as future professionals. All project team members and students agreed the value of the fund-raising project had introduced career options that they had previously not considered. This was indicated not solely in terms of employment within the region but wider

afield, and different career opportunities they had not considered until engaging with the project as indicated within interview:

"I always thought if you worked for a charity you didn't get paid, I didn't realise you cud do this as a job…" (Student 9)

"I never heard of the jobs that people do on the children's wards… this is what I want to do now…" (Student 3)

"I knew I wanted to sort of make a difference you know but not what so I thought you had to sort of be a social worker but I don't now I would like to join the police now…" (Student 11)

Students felt that the combination of seeing 'out there' 'in here' and development of their own self-confidence and self-esteem/ self -image, the sense of belonging and feeling part of the wider community had provided them with more confidence and skills for when they graduate and "*the most important bit though is I get it now- I understand what the lectures are about and I can see how you do this when you are working.."* (Student 15) This is consistent with Mills' (2008) extension of Bourdieu's concept of habitus. The reproductive and transformative potential of habitus suggests that, at times, students recognise the constraint of social conditions/ conditionings and read a future that fits them. However there is also the opportunity for some students to recognise the opportunity for improvisation and go on to generate action in their social and academic environments.

Conclusions:

During the 3 phases of Action Research, the team was able to reflect upon not only the impact of the project, but the impact upon pedagogical relationships between lecturer-student. It was felt by the project team that the activities and project had enhanced lecturer-student relationships and encouraged lecturer accessibility (in that

students reported they felt more comfortable in approaching team members). Team members concurred that the project had fostered a higher level of participation in informal contexts for students and peer support relationships; within activities and both within and across year cohort groups, a notion confirmed by student feedback. This suggests this approach can be instrumental in promoting student habitus and social capital within themselves and their studies (Bourdieu 1986). Despite having no real evidence to ascertain that the fund-raising activities alone had built value added components into established modules, and that this had supported the overall student experience and sense of identity, student and staff feedback suggests that the activities had made a positive impact. This suggested that the initiative had been successful in meeting the areas outlined and that the impact of developing fund-raising partnerships as an integral aspect at module and programme level made a positive impact upon the student experience. Data generated alongside the project team's observations and reflections suggest that the objectives were met and that

1. Fund-raising activities developed as enhancement activities do provide value added structures into established modules.
2. Fund-raising activities broaden, develop and strengthen links with the local wider community.
3. Fund-raising activities developed as an integral aspect at module and programme level extends opportunities between the students and organisations.

What was not interrogated in depth during this activity was the level of variable measures aligned to cohort dynamics and student individuality that could have swayed the findings presented within this report. There are many reasons why the level of student engagement and enterprise may have been different during the first

phase than that of merely providing fund-raising activities, which is acknowledged by those leading this project. Levels of student engagement, both academic and social, sometimes vary within students groups and between students. Both Thomas and May's (2010) and Tinto's (1975) models suggest that there are many factors that impact upon student engagement; however, the key to successful engagement involves the blending of the social and academic throughout the students' entire university career. The level of impact was difficult to ascertain as an individual component however it was also felt that the project had made a real 'visible' impact upon the local community through supporting community ventures: for example, over the period of the 3 phases the fund-raising project provided the Great North Children's Hospital resources for play specialists. It also provided real support for families and their children working with the Children's Society; for example paying for a number of family units to visit a theme park. Students reported that it was the ability to enhance the lives of 'others' that had made a real difference to them and whilst they enjoyed taking part in activities it was bringing the outside inside that promoted the transformative impact upon them individually as discussed by Mills (2008).

Throughout this research process the team supported the value of utilising an action research cyclical approach. In that this approach offered the reflective and continuous aspect the team was seeking rather than a one-off project. From commencement, it was never intended that the project should be developed as a one off event. The ability to reflect and refine, discuss and develop, adapt and assimilate was the fundamental basis from which to build the research structure and framework.

Additionally the fund-raising activity programme has helped to build knowledge partnerships between the University and local community as well as outreach links. This provided experiential placements for students, guest speakers and facilitated research development capacity with said organisations. From this basis the project team feel that this cost effective approach is suitable for a wide range of modules and programmes and can be adopted and adapted to a number of University programmes to establish a 'best fit' between students, staff, programme and locality. This project contributed to the Centre for Children, Young People and Family aims and objectives at the University of Sunderland. This project has helped to open up further opportunities to students in relation to 'volunteerism' such as 'buddy schemes' and opportunities to work within communities with children who for a variety of reasons require additional support.

Overall when reflecting upon the aim of this project to evaluate the impact of developing fund-raising partnerships as an integral aspect at both module and programme level, grounded within practitioner action research, the project was successful. Action research offered the opportunity for professionals to develop their practice as reflective practitioners through a cyclical process. Whilst such projects may be limited with reference to transferability the basis of this project achieved the overall goal within the specified setting. A core component of this aim was to develop value added structures into established modules, to support both student experience and student identity. Student feedback and discussion highlighted this had been achieved throughout the project and had opened up further opportunities for the students involved.

Furthermore the project sought to broaden, develop and strengthen links with the local wider community. This was achieved through community fund-raising events such as the 'Zumba' and Ski-Athon that were reported within local media and promoted via local radio broadcast as community events. Moreover, by providing resources for the wider community it enabled 'out there' to be part of 'in here' which was noted as a real distinct asset by students.

As a final aspect the team set out to develop integration opportunities between the students and organisations in order to develop awareness of a wider range of student workforce options as future professionals. This was met through the developed links made throughout the project and was indicated as successful within group feedback. On the basis of the success of the project in meeting the aims so defined, the team feel that developing such activities within the formal curriculum does enhance the student experience and can promote student identity within Higher Education via 'volunteerism'. By student demand the project continues to date as an integral aspect at module and programme level.

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