CS200 Social Entrepreneurs, Sustainability & Community Action: Observations on a Pedagogical Experiment

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Definitions:
Social Enterprise & Social Entrepreneurs

◆ ‘Social enterprise is about changing the world through business. Social enterprises exist and trade not to maximise profit, but to further their social and environmental aims’.

(‘State of Social Enterprise Survey 2015’, Social Enterprise UK)

◆ ‘Social entrepreneurs identify under-utilised resources—people, buildings, equipment—and find ways of putting them to use to satisfy unmet social needs. They innovate new welfare services and new ways of delivering existing services. Social entrepreneurs who deploy entrepreneurial skills are at work in parts of the traditional public sector, some large private sector corporations, and at the most innovative edge of the voluntary sector’

The UK Social Enterprise Sector
(Source: State of Social Enterprise Survey 2015, Social Enterprise UK)

- **70,000** social enterprises (nearly half less than 5 years old)
- Employ nearly **1 million** people (c. 5% of UK workforce)
- **31%** work in the **20%** most deprived communities
- **51%** employ at least one person disadvantaged in labour market
- **27%** derive main income from goods & services to public sector
- Average pay ratio (CEO to lowest paid worker): **3.6: 1** compared to **150:1** for FTSE Top 100 companies
CS200: Preparing Students for the World of Work & the ‘Work of the World’

Sources of inspiration and initial rationale for CS200

♦ Orientations of interdisciplinary & area studies students
♦ Community engagement in degrees & modules in US & Taiwan
♦ Research on climate change & sustainability initiatives
♦ Changing student profiles & needs (lower tariffs, introduction of fees, increased competition in schooling system, internet generation):
  ♦ Less time for extra-curricular activities
  ♦ Greater range of academic & transferable skills on university entry
  ♦ Increased prevalence of mechanical & instrumental approach to studies.

♦ Value of active & interactive pedagogies for ‘de-routinising’ learning, skills & knowledge acquisition.
Module Structure:
From Theory to Practice

- Introduction
- Changing Relations Between State, Market and Civil Society
- Climate Change, Environmental Crisis & Sustainability
- Guest Q & A: Dan Weisselberg, BristolGreenDoors
- Acting For Sustainability: Student Case Study Presentations
- Social Entrepreneurs, Well-Being & Forms of Social Enterprise
- Organisational Forms: Social Enterprises & For-Profit Companies
- Guest Lecture: John Niland, CEO, PROVIDE, Colchester
- Project Design, Sources of Funding & Training
- Group Tutorials: Preliminary Project Ideas
  (Christmas vacation)
- Project Presentations Workshops
Developing Skills: Assignments

◆ Joint research & presentation on a sustainability NGO/ social enterprise or company sustainability policy (10%)
◆ Individual written report (10%)
◆ Reflective essay on the joint research and presentation (10%)
◆ Short CV (10%)
◆ Reflective essay: the advantages/ disadvantages of working for a social enterprise (10%)
◆ Individual project presentation (10%)
◆ Project proposal, 2,500 words (40%)

✔ Developing voice, professional writing & oral skills
✔ Real-world research, summarising & handling data
✔ Identifying needs, gaps in provision, & models of good practice
✔ Problem-solving, creativity, initiative & project design
✔ Enhanced self-confidence & ability to give/act on feedback.
Student Responses 1

Before taking the module, students had little knowledge of:

◆ Macro-level trends in public policy (e.g. privatization & austerity; emissions reductions)
◆ The social enterprise sector
◆ Sustainability initiatives & policies (& cost-reduction benefits)
◆ The amount of information available online
◆ Types of for-profit/not for profit organisations
◆ Opportunities for obtaining funding, training, and support for social entrepreneurship and setting up social enterprises

OR

◆ Writing in appropriate professional registers & formats
◆ Project design & proposal writing
Student Responses 2

Students particularly liked:

- Sessions with outside guest speakers
- Interactive pedagogy & peer-to-peer learning
- Workshop format & mutual trust this generated → safe space for enhancing skills
- Diversity of assignments & session formats
- Axis of progression in module structure → v. good attendance, participation & coursework submission
Student Responses 3: Developing Project Proposals

Some initial common difficulties:

- Conceptualising the value of micro-level initiatives
- The logic of starting small then scaling up...
- Researching existing provision to ‘find the gap’
- Minimising costs

Feedback in group tutorials crucial for refining initial ideas & directions for research on needs & gap in provision

Further feedback in presentation workshops on project design
Types of Project

- ‘Psycho-Pro: helping the unemployed get back to work’ (Madrid, Spain)
- ‘Composting for kids: recycling waste and enhancing ecoliteracy in schools’ (California)
- ‘The Coffee Bean Café: enabling the homeless get back on their feet’ (Poole)

And closer to home
- ‘Shopping Together: A scheme to support older people in the Dutch Quarter, Colchester’
- ‘University Sports: combatting obesity and unfitness among secondary school students’
- ‘The Green Café & Study Centre: an alternative space for students at the University of Essex’
Dan Roberts: ‘Waste Not Want Not: Sustainable Social Housing in Stowmarket’
Sophie McShane: ‘The Book Club: Combating Loneliness Among Older People in Residential Care’ (Corby)
Relevance Beyond the Social Enterprise Sector?

- For-profit, micro-enterprise and start-ups
- Designing small/local initiatives in larger NGOs & public sector organisations e.g. local government, education, health & social care sectors
- Research and project work in commercial organisations
- Enhanced social, transferable & employability skills relevant to jobs in the wider labour market