



THINKING INSIDE THE BOX

A pedagogical journey through archival engagement

Introduction

'Thinking inside the box' is a project that utilises archival sources on the political resistance and struggle in Latin America in the 1970s to provide students with an alternative perspective on historical events and learning. Previous work by Freire (2022) inspired the project to challenge the traditional approach of 'Banking education', where students are treated as passive receivers of information rather than active participants. The project's approach aimed to strike a healthy relationship between education and liberation where university students are in the centre of the spectrum of oppressor (reinforcing dominant cultural values and interests) and the oppressed (liberation through dialogue and self-reflection).

Aim

to investigate the elements used within the project and assessing if they were successful and how they have impacted students, staff and stakeholders who participated. Collating their experiences and opinions to compare archive-based teaching to traditional lecture-based teaching and conclude whether alternative teaching methods should be used to populate and diversify the curriculum.

Methodology

For the staff and public interviews, we used a semi structured approach with both predetermined and unplanned questions. Why? (Kakilla, 2021)

- Everyone had different levels of involvement in the project, so it was difficult to standardise questions
- allowed flexibility and adaptability
- Ask more personalised questions

For students we used 'Friendship as a method, consisting of reciprocal peer-to-peer interviewing where participants interviewed each other. Overall, interviewing 8 pairs online via teams.

Why? (Payne-Gifford, 2020), (Coar & Sim, 2006)

- Allowed participants to feel comfortable and build a rapport
- Open discussion of difficult topics
- Answers are less scripted

Findings

STAFF INTERVIEWS

phrasings such as 'gatekeeping' and 'reluctant to give up' were used to describe the unchanged nature of education institutions.

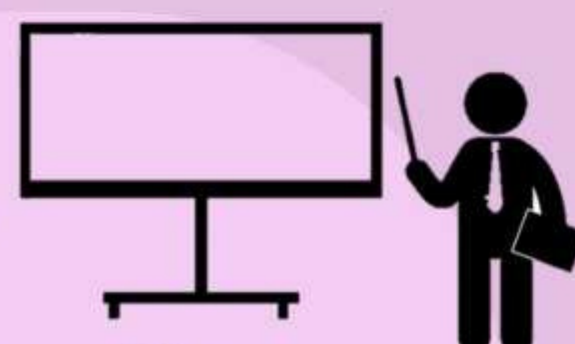
The project offered chances of liberation. They often felt constrained and 'disempowered' by having to teach fixed modules that were not even within their own area of expertise.

'I have no investment in them because I haven't designed them'

'They are being bored to death'

'The university system is not set up to teach well' as 'lecturers are not judged on the quality of teaching they provide'

Thinking inside the box was highly supported by staff as its an 'inclusive way of engaging the students with different learning sensitivities' and 'a more of a meaningful way to assess engagement'.



STUDENT INTERVIEWS

Traditional teaching	Teaching in the project
'Ticking boxes like you're just trying to get a grade.'	'this project just meant so much more to me than university because we guided it, we made it.'
'Assessing how well you can regurgitate someone else's ideas'	'most experience rich'
'Distant connection with academics'	'getting that side of history that would have otherwise. Just been deleted'
'you're looking at history from quite like the detached point of view'	'really allowed you to follow an inspiration'
'University machine'	'feel like you are speaking outside of that kind of student bubble'



Student-led- More motivated and engaged as they can choose their outcomes, More sense of achievement, opportunities for self-reflection, felt liberated in their own opinions and interpretations

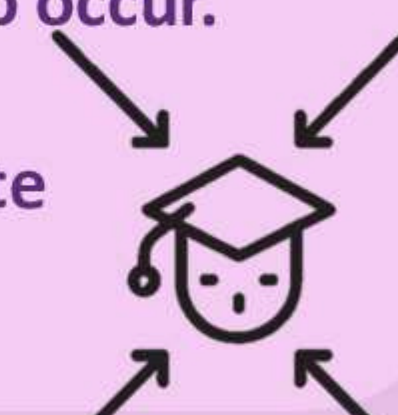
Relationships- Students felt more connected to Academics. Able to burst out of the student bubble and engage with the community. Many said it allowed them to 'put faces to the history' and to attach meaning to the content. Having that space to collaborate with fellow students and learn from each other was a highlight for most students.

Experience- Provided research skills and experience working with primary sources that benefitted many in preparation for their masters, additionally acquiring so many unique skills that were considered more relevant for their future careers.

Findings suggest staff find it hard to engage students when they aren't engaged themselves providing potential reasons for the division despite both parties unknowingly having similar feelings.

Furthermore, there should be utilisation of informal learning spaces across the university. This approach not only fosters a sense of comfort among students but also facilitates dynamic and active learning. After many individuals expressed casual interactions during the project held greater value compared to numerous seminars they've attended. To implement this, we should enhance opportunities for discussion, dedicate time for discussions within lectures, informal chat groups and use more natural environments for learning to occur.

Overall, we should be aiming to use a variation of teaching methods that are student centred, allow choice and freedom, promote collaboration and unique skill acquisition. To provide students with education enrichment and a fulfilling university experience.



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Credits

Thank you to my inspiring supervisor Anna Grimaldi for all the support. Also, to my fellow scholars Grace Nash and Hazel Maris who I have worked in collaboration with. I feel lucky to have shared this experience with you all.

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