

CONNECTING STUDENTS WITH RESEARCH THROUGH ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN PROJECTS: AN EXPERIENCE IN A DESIGN AND MULTIMEDIA DEGREE

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Abstract:

The relationship between students and the higher education institutions has been perceived differently in the literature and policy documents, including a variety of terms such as "consumers," "active participants," "community of learning," "students as change agents," "students as partners," and "students as co-creators of learning and teaching" (Bovill et al., 2016; Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Dunne & Zandstra, 2011; Matthews et al., 2018). In recent years, higher education has seen a growth in research and practice focused on students becoming active partners in the processes of learning and teaching. For example, inquiry and research-based learning, as well as problem and project-based learning, have assumed greater importance. Engagement in research and collaborative forms of pedagogical relationships between academics and students are considered important elements to improving teaching and learning (Sousa, Lopes, & Boyd, 2020). By involving students in research projects, the teaching staff opens opportunities for problem-based and student-centered approaches where the role of the academic/ teacher is to facilitate learning and to provide guidance and information (Willcoxson et al., 2011). Students and academics work in a more horizontal and collaborative way. Therefore, the importance of explicitly inviting students to connect with researchers and research as an integral part of their learning journey has been highlighted (Fung, 2017).

This paper presents the experience of the Multimedia Technologies and Design degree of involving students in research projects developed by the teaching staff. In four different funded research projects, with several partners from different external institutions, students were invited to participate as members of the research teams. The involvement was not part of any assignment and therefore constituted an extracurricular activity that students volunteered for. This year, four students are engaged, participating in the work that is connected to all four projects. The initiative is underpinned by the concept of a "community of practice" developed by Wenger (1998), who advocated the idea that learning is social. A community of practice is organized around groups of people who share common interests or concerns and who are able to deepen their knowledge about a specific subject by interacting regularly (Wenger, 1998, 2007).

In the paper, the process of involvement of the students in the projects is analyzed. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the projects have been developed without in-person meetings. The technological solutions that were implemented will be analyzed in terms of limitations and advantages for the active participation of the students and contributions for collaboration. Through the description of the workflow implemented, specific challenges of involving students in research projects from the field of Design and Multimedia will be substantiated.

Keywords:

Active Learning, Design and Multimedia, Student Involvement in Research, Higher Education.