

Study 3:
Validation of the model and
further exploration

Introduction

There are a number of practices that are claimed to be relevant to employability capabilities and which can be embedded by teachers within mainstream courses. They include strategies such as: Group work; problem based learning; project work; enquiry based learning; field trips; etc. This project wanted to go beyond these general active learning techniques to see if there were distinct way to develop employability capabilities. The researchers also wanted to assess the validity of the proposed pedagogical framework.

Aims

To assess the validity of the pedagogical framework and identify relevant teaching practices.

Method

We adopted a positive deviance approach. In other words, we sought examples of practice that were unusual and successful despite systemic issues that leveraged against their adoption. We set out to identify positively deviant practices and, later on, positively deviant people. A set of criteria were agreed and partners submitted details of practices and people they believed met the criteria. The intension was to investigate and evaluate these sources of data to assess their efficacy and fit with the pedagogical framework.

Findings

Although the search for positively deviant practices revealed many good or best practices, no unique pedagogies or approaches were discovered. We concluded that this research endeavour was flawed and that little could be learnt about transformative teaching by seeking isolated teaching practices.

The interviews with positively deviant people, however, were much more enlightening. Interviewees were invited to comment on the draft pedagogical framework. To many interviewees the model appeared almost obvious, even commonsensical. To others, it seemed to be almost a revelation, a capturing of what they had been doing instinctively. Most could readily comment on all dimensions, identifying multiple ways to address individual dimensions and other teaching practices that served two or more simultaneously. Thus, the results were reassuring in terms of the face validity of the framework. The feedback and

critique from interviewees was used to inform refinements to the way the framework was presented and the list of relevant practices.

The question remained, however, over why these teachers appear to successfully embed employability in their courses when other members of staff do not or cannot. Further analysis revealed that the answer seemed to lie not in which specific techniques were used, but in how multiple techniques were used. Our analysis suggested that positive deviants had what the researchers came to call an 'employability mindset'. The mindset was characterized by four distinctive features: a focus on the future; a perception of students as individual people; a concern with what happens within the teacher's sphere of influence and; a passion to make a difference.

Conclusions and next steps

The findings of this study were reassuring, in that the pedagogical framework was consistent with the practices of positive deviants. However, the study also discovered that the positive deviants had quite distinct mindsets. The discovery of the mindset casts doubt on the utility of the pedagogical framework. While we know the framework is consistent with the practices of positive deviants we do not know whether the majority of teaching staff, who do not share these mindsets, can be supported to act in the ways that positive deviants act. This was the subject of the fourth study.