

PACE Theory of Change: Discussion Paper

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Introduction

The following Discussion Paper has been prepared by the Center for Theory of Change to assist the PACE program in Macquarie University (MQ) in the articulation of its Theory of Change (ToC). This ToC is a component of the PACE development and evaluation strategy.

The Theory of Change to date has articulated an overall goal for PACE. This is that *“MQ students, staff, partners and graduates are actively engaging in social, economic, political, and environmental changes in their own contexts to contribute to a more sustainable and peaceful world”*. It has then identified four key long term outcomes for achieving this overall goal, one of which relates to MQ graduates i.e. that *“MQ graduates are using their influence to create positive changes with others”*.

This Discussion Paper is based on a review of research that has focused on this fourth long term outcome, with a particular aim of documenting research relating to some of the key preconditions identified by PACE for achieving it. These include employability, development of positive values, promoting respect for diversity and the role of civic engagement in equipping graduates to have influence and to use this influence to create positive change with others. Within each of these spheres, the paper also reviewed research on enabling conditions within the universities to support the achievement of these preconditions. These are summarized as follows and then explored in more detail:

1. **Employability:** It is clear that MQ graduates will not be in a position to create positive change in their chosen field if they are not employable to begin with. One consistent research finding that supports the priority that MQ and PACE attach to developing linkages with the community, including the business sector, is that employers are increasingly seeking graduates with employment experience specific to the chosen field of work. The research also indicates changes in the concept of employability itself, with greater value being placed by employers on capabilities linked to having and applying positive social values.
2. **Developing Positive Values:** Employability may be a necessary precondition for a graduate to be in a position to influence positive change, but it is not necessarily a sufficient precondition for them to do so. The role of universities in creating an environment through which positive values can be developed by students and carried to the areas in which they work and live has been highlighted consistently. However, challenges have been noted. For example, how to ensure that students carry over the values that they develop in university into their work and lives as graduates.
3. **Awareness and Respect for Diversity:** Promoting awareness and respect for diversity in universities is an important part of the values that they seek to promote. Respect for diversity is also an important factor in creating the conditions for key aspects of learning including creativity and innovation. By promoting respect for diversity, universities are also meeting a growing need, both from employers and from the wider community, for the skills

and awareness necessary to support diverse work places, diverse customers and diverse societies.

4. **Civic Engagement and Active Citizenship in Higher Education:** Research consistently shows that university graduates are more likely to be engaged with their communities. This has been related to the so-called “college effect” where the experience of going to college leads to an expanded social network of educated peers and greater exposure to civic norms and responsibilities. Promoting civic engagement therefore, can be a key precondition for supporting students to create positive change in the context in which they live and work. Activities undertaken by universities to support such engagement include those focused on developing the institution’s own connections with the community in which they are placed, experiential learning and service learning. The research strongly suggest the need for a comprehensive set of activities to promote active citizenship rather than focusing on a single initiative which may be necessary, but may not be sufficient for establishing a form of civic engagement that results in positive change.

The brief review of research relating to each of these areas is outlined in more detail in the following sections.

1. Employability

In line with PACE’s Theory of Change, it is clear that MQ students and graduates will not be in a position to contribute to positive change in spheres in which they work unless they are employable. There is a very significant body of literature on employability and its components. This includes studies showing the increased importance of attributes that could be linked to creating positive change. Recent reports by the International Labor Organization (Brewer, 2013), the Chronicle of Higher Education (2013), the European Commission (Humber, Velden and Verhgen 2013) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2015) highlight the comprehensive elements of employability, noting that it takes more than academic achievement to secure suitable employment. Employability in their view also means that graduates are prepared and equipped with relevant professional experience, relevant skills and attributes that will help them succeed in the work force.

An important finding from this research, given the emphasis of MQ and PACE in developing linkages with the community (including employers), is the growing importance attached to work experience related directly to the field in which a graduate is seeking employment. The research also highlights the importance of interpersonal skills (i.e. team work and communication skills) computer skills, graduates being internationally oriented and professional and personal attributes such as honesty and having a work ethic.

The significance of key skills and of work place experience in enhancing them was highlighted in the European Commission study and in research undertaken in the particular context of Australia. For example, a survey conducted by Bond University on employability among graduates, faculty and employers found that students’ engagement with relevant employment

contexts was rated most strongly by employers (Kinash and Crane, 2015). Employers surveyed distinguished between employment experience opportunities (for example, internships) that relate to the students discipline area (and provide an extension of their studies in that area) and those that are unrelated to their discipline. The former were more highly valued by employers than the latter (2014:158).

The impact of employer preferences (and a concern for greater employment outcomes) on the agenda of higher learning has been explored in another recent Australian study (Smith et al, 2014). The study focused in particular on the positive impact of work integrated learning (WIL) on employability. WIL incorporated placements and simulation of real work situations, but the research found that the impact of actual placements exceeded that of simulation. The research also identified some key aspects of the curriculum that contributed to quality outcomes. These included the authenticity of the placement or WIL activity, quality preparation (for both students and hosts), access to quality supervision and alignment of WIL activity and assessments to WIL appropriate learning outcomes (2014: 7).

The Bond University survey highlighted some of the challenges in facilitating student access to employment opportunities that more directly promote employability in the area in which they wish to work. For example, higher education personnel referred to lack of funding as a barrier to providing graduates with opportunities to practice in their areas of study (Kinash and Crane, 2015). Lack of funding may exacerbate existing inequities between students as more resourced students can avail of unpaid internships directly related to their field of study while poorer students may have to focus on less career relevant employment experience to support themselves in college.

Similar findings on the importance of direct experience have emerged from other studies, although some suggest a much broader set of “capabilities” needed by students. For example Hinchliff and Jolly (2011), refer to the themes emerging from research on employability which they believe call into question the traditional mode of graduate employability comprising skills, competencies and attributes. What emerges is a four pronged concept of “student identity” that encompasses values, intellect, social engagement and performance (with performance defined as the ability to apply intellect and skills in the workplace and to deliver results). The authors conclude that the values universities are often concerned to foster - diversity, environmental awareness, the value of citizenship, an interest in culture and intellectual rigor - are also valued by employers (2011).

Issues also emerge from the Hinchliffe and Jolly research that have implications for the enabling factors that can guide universities in promoting values that are sustained by students and which are valued by employers. For example, the authors stress the importance of experience in applying “social values” and ethics in real situations. Evidence of applying these values in practice indicates to the employer that the graduate is more likely to be aware of and respond

to the normative environment in which the business operates (2011:576). The importance of diversity awareness and experience of diversity to employers is also noted, in particular that employers are looking for experience of actual engagement with diverse people in a wide variety of contexts (2011).

2. Developing Positive Values:

Employability in the PACE Theory of Change is a necessary precondition for MQ students to create positive change in the contexts in which they live and work, but is unlikely to be a sufficient precondition (although as noted, there are certain aspects of employability which seem to support positive values and other attributes which may provide the basis for positive change). The Theory of Change highlights the additional importance of values and ethics.

There is a considerable body of literature on the precise role of universities in promoting values. For example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has identified ways in which universities can engage in sustainable development goals. These include their role *“as a link between knowledge generation and transfer of knowledge to society”* and *“their contribution to societal development through outreach”* (2009). And the economist Richard Florida has emphasized the role of universities in helping shape a regional environment that is open to new ideas and diversity, which are considered key preconditions for the development of creativity and innovation (2014).

There is also a body of research outlining what universities can do to promote positive values that are sustained by students. Significant in this respect is the concept of *“student identity”* and the way in which values that students develop are related to the context in which they study and the opportunities they have to apply their values in practice (Holmes, 2006; Hinchcliffe and Jolly, 2011). Creating such a context in which positive values flourish and endure requires a very comprehensive approach by universities and higher education institutions. For example, research published by the Institute for Education in London notes that if the goal of an educational process is to produce graduates with values such as respect, honesty, diversity, integrity and responsible citizenship, then the *“the way to achieve that is through an ethos, a culture, an environment, in which respect, peace, honesty and responsibility are the hallmark of how the school community organizes itself”* (Drake, 2007).

The way in which teaching is conducted is also critical. For example, the Institute for Education research emphasizes that *“values must be seen to lie not only at the heart of the educational content, the “what” of education, but also at the heart of the educational process, the “how”, the way in which education is conducted”* (Drake, 2007). Creating such opportunities has been a key element of curriculum development by some universities. For example, Babson College in US (BC, 2015) has created a curriculum to promote ethical values which rather than focusing on

ethical analysis, centers on ethical implementation and asks the question: What would I say and do if I were going to act on my values?

Studies on human rights education have also emphasized the importance of building students' knowledge, skills and ultimately their attitudes as a key basis for establishing an enduring commitment to human rights (OHCHR, 2012; UNICEF, 2007). An important component in achieving these outcomes, particularly the development of skills, is the provision of opportunities for students to develop an awareness of human rights issues and to apply them in practical contexts. A similar approach has been suggested by the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement in the US, which traces out a schema for higher education institutions to support civic learning that leads to positive collective action. This schema includes knowledge (for example, of the history of democracy and diverse cultures), skills (capacity for critical enquiry, deliberation and bridge building etc.) and values (for example empathy, respect for justice and freedom, equality, human rights etc.), all leading to collective action (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012).

3. Awareness and Respect For Diversity

Respect and awareness of diversity is a particularly important part of the values that universities are seeking to promote. Respect for diversity is not just good in itself but is also an increasingly sought after attribute by employers. The "business case for diversity" is now firmly established in the policy literature and many corporations and employers (especially in key growth sectors such as the knowledge economy) have developed a range of policies and practices to attract and accommodate diverse staff and customers (UK Department for Business and Skills, 2013; ILO, 2014; World Bank Group, 2010).

There also is growing literature on the broader economic case for diversity (see for example, Dublin City Council and GLEN, 2011). According to economist Richard Florida "*economic growth in the Creative Economy is driven by 3Ts: technology, talent and tolerance.....But technology and talent have been mainly seen as stocks that accumulate in regions or nations. In reality both technology and talent are flows. The ability to capture these flows requires understanding the third T, tolerance, the openness of a place to new ideas and new people. Places increase their ability to capture these flows by being open to the wildest range of people across categories of ethnicity, race, national origin, age, social class and sexual orientation*" (Florida, 2014). Universities, he notes, have a huge role in supporting diverse societies by creating diverse campuses themselves and creating the conditions through which respect for diversity is nurtured and extended to the wider society (Florida, 2014, 2006).

The need for diversity to become an integral component of a graduate's learning experience has also been highlighted by UNESCO in a report prepared for the World Conference on Higher Education. This report states that one of the challenges of diversity (in this case diversity

related to nationality) lies in the gulf between traditional teaching (i.e. teaching methods or strategies for domestic students) and the expectations of the new student cohort (i.e. teaching strategies for international students). Rather than seeing this as a problem with their teaching methods, the report notes that faculty are sometimes inclined to see this as more of a *"student problem and expect students to adapt to their new learning environment"* (UNESCO, 2009). They note the success of universities, for example, in Mexico in creating curricula that accommodates diverse languages, culture and histories where indigenous people do not feel like outsiders and can relate to the university on a personal level (2009).

Creating an enabling environment for diversity clearly requires much more than just curriculum development. It requires a high level of institutional commitment to put in place all the conditions necessary to support diversity which encompasses all aspects of university life. For example, research in the United States has found that *"higher perceived levels of institutional commitment to diversity are associated with perceptions of relatively low racial tension among African American, Chicano, and, to some extent, white students"* (Chang, Milem, Anonio, 2005). And an environment conducive to diversity is one where prejudice and discrimination are addressed, where there are opportunities for meaningful intercultural learning and where diversity and diverse people are valued and celebrated (Top Universities, 2012).

UNESCO emphasizes that learning about cultures should include not only the acquisition of knowledge about other cultures, but also the development of skills and attitudes which allow learners to take part in meaningful intercultural dialogue (UNESCO, 2011). It cautions against superficial notions of celebration that fail to acknowledge the way in which difference may be seen as a deficit or as a way of stigmatizing groups. Celebrating linguistic diversity, for example, without at the same time developing multilingual policies, can heighten the lack of access to the curriculum and widen educational inequalities as well as making the call for celebration of diversity seem empty of meaning (2011).

4. Civic Engagement and Active citizenship in Higher Education

Another precondition identified in PACE Theory of Change is the importance of civic engagement and active citizenship in supporting graduates in creating positive change with others. There is a broad range of definitions of civic engagement and active citizenship, some focused on the form of activity (for example, participation in politics, engagement with community organizations etc.) and some also focusing on aims and objectives. For example, with regard to the latter, the European Union has defined active citizenship as a *"form of participation to promote social cohesion, continuation of participatory and representative democracy and to reduce the gap between citizens and governing institutions"* (JRC, 2009).

Research has consistently shown that university students are more likely to be civically engaged and involved in their communities (Newell, 2012; Flanagan and Levine, 2010; Baum et al, 2013;

National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012). This has been attributed to what has been called the "college effect" — where the experience of going to college leads to an expanded social network of educated peers and greater exposure to civic norms and responsibilities (Sullivan, 2010). And the importance of college in this respect has grown. For example, according to Flanagan and Levine (2010): “As the transition to adulthood has lengthened, colleges have become perhaps the central institution for civic incorporation of younger generations. But no comparable institution exists for young adults who do not attend college” (2010: 159).

There is in turn a large body of research literature on how civic engagement and active citizenship can be supported through universities. Campuses, it has been noted, can be critical sites for honing students’ civic knowledge, skills, values, and actions, and for preparing them for lives of public purpose as well as employment (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012). Actions to support this broadly defined view of civic engagement can encompass organized volunteering, community-based research, partnerships between colleges or universities and nearby community organizations, political discussion and debate on campus, courses that impart civic skills, student-produced news media, internships, study-abroad opportunities, and events and exhibitions meant to serve communities (Ryan and Stritch, 2008; Ellsworth and Burns, 2009; Flanagan and Levine, 2010; Bowen, 2010).

Of particular relevance to PACE Theory of Change however, are the aspects of civic engagement that will most likely lead graduates to create positive change for others. On this point Collins and Clark (2013) outlined some of the underlying factors that might explain a connection between civic engagement and creating positive change on the part of young people. These include the link between civic engagement and increased political participation and the creation of “social capital” that supports progressive values (2013:8).

Not all forms of civic engagement necessarily lead to progressive values or political participation or action. In the US for example, there has been some criticism of “service learning”, which is a leading form of civic engagement in many colleges and schools. This combines formal instruction with a related service in the community. Flanagan (2008) for example, highlights research which contends that direct service to communities in the absence of discussion about the underlying causes of public problems and policy options to address those problems may divert young people towards charity and away from political action (2008).

Important here, it has been suggested, is the need for higher education institutions to establish a clear definition of what is meant by civic engagement and active citizenship. It may be helpful to think of the concept of active citizenship as a continuum, with limited citizenship at one end (where people are not concerned with their role in social problems) and at the other end being an “active citizen”, where the welfare of the community becomes a priority in values and life choices. In between these points are a person’s role as a volunteer (where they are well

intentioned but may not be that educated on social problems) and, moving towards active citizenship, “conscientious citizenship” which is concerned with uncovering the root causes of social problems (Alternative Breaks, 2015).

A number of reports have identified how “service learning” and other approaches to promoting civic engagement can lead to this form of active citizenship. For example, one report notes that *“service-learning courses that tie service to course content supports students’ commitment to social activism, their awareness of social and economic inequality and systemic causes of those inequities, and their personal feelings of social responsibility”* (Flanagan and Levine, 2010). The authors identify research which shows that engaging in diversity workshops and socializing with diverse groups of peers, discussing social and political issues with fellow students, joining student organizations and participating in learning communities and collaborative learning strengthen students’ community orientation and commitments (2010:38).

Other studies have highlighted the importance of “institutionalizing” these various approaches by ensuring they are *“inextricably linked to the core mission of the institution”* (Sponsler and Hartley, 2013). Also considered important is creating a campus ethos for civic engagement (for example, where there are meaningful ways for students to be involved in institutional decision making) and the use of every available channel of the curriculum. The key components of the latter include creating opportunities for applied learning, the ability to practice civic skills, and opportunities for personal development through reflection and relationship building (Sponsler and Hartley, 2013).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this Discussion Paper provides a brief review of some of the research literature related to the key preconditions for achieving the long term outcome in the PACE Theory of Change that *“MQ graduates are using their influence to create positive changes with others”*. These include four preconditions, each of which is necessary but which on its own may not be sufficient for achieving the long term outcome. These include employability, developing positive values, respect and awareness for diversity and civic engagement. The research paper also outlines examples of enabling factors or conditions within universities which support these key preconditions.

Of particular importance across each precondition are the following:

- The significance of external partnerships in supporting the capacity of universities to deliver a key component of employability i.e., direct experience in employment related to a particular university discipline. Also important is the changing concept of employability itself, based on a greater demand by employers for capabilities which encompass values and attributes that may support graduates in effecting positive change.

- The significance of promoting values and the establishment within universities of opportunities for students to apply and express these values in practical situations. Providing such opportunities is an important means of supporting a “student identity” where values developed and nurtured in college can be sustained into employment and life after university.
- Awareness and respect for diversity which helps students avail of opportunities that arise in increasingly diverse and globalized workplaces and societies. Respect for diversity can best be nurtured in universities through comprehensive approaches that embrace ethos, culture, policy and associated programs and practices.
- Finally, civic engagement and active citizenship are important preconditions for creating positive change if they embrace a comprehensive set of connections across different spheres including political participation and community development linked to progressive values.

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