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5. Towards ethically sustainable societal engagement of higher education. Case HEISE challenge-solving projects using arts-based methods

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The Higher Education for Societal Impact (HEISE) project (funded by Erasmus+ from 9/2016–8/2019) aimed to build a roadmap for higher education institutes (HEI) for societal engagement, including a toolkit for teachers to plan and implement challenge-based learning activities utilising arts-based methods. The roadmap is founded on the premises that higher education institutions' engagement with other actors in society will lead to societal impact in the longer run. The roadmap is designed for both managers and teachers. It introduces novel ways to increase intercultural understanding and social inclusion, including practical examples and tools for learning and managerial activities. For HEI managers, the roadmap provides ideas and examples for how to understand and assess the societal impact of HEIs. (See Ateca-Amestoy et al. 2019.)

During the project, bachelor students of social services at Laurea University of Applied Sciences carried out dozens of challenge-solving projects with different stakeholders, such as children, youth, immigrants, mental health rehabilitees, substance abusers and the elderly. Altogether 145 students took part in the project. Challenge-solving teams used arts-based methods to find new perspectives on the challenge at hand, to create a shared understanding of the issue and to learn different actors' experiences.

In this article, we elaborate on the concepts of societal engagement and societal impact to open up a wider perspective of challenge-based learning with arts-based methods. Next, we discuss the ethical issues related to social work, arts-based methods and challenge-based projects. Then we proceed to reflecting on how the innovative educational approach of challenge-solving projects utilising arts-based methods manifests the ethical codes of the professional practices of HEIs. Finally, we present our conclusions on HEIs' societal engagement and impact related to challenge-based learning emphasizing the ethical aspects of HEI practice.

SOCIETAL IMPACT AND SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The concepts of social and societal impact are often perceived as synonymous. However, in the HEISE project we considered societal impact to be a broader concept than social impact. It comprises but also goes beyond social impact (see, e.g., Belfiore and Bennet 2008). Analysis of the current definitions of societal impact also suggests that a comprehensive and theoretically founded definition of societal impact seems to be missing from the literature. The definitions are too narrow with regard to the type of impact (e.g., intended vs. unintended); they disregard causality, or they are defined in a way that leads to partly overlapping definitions. (See Ateca-Amestoy et al. 2019.)

There is also a lot of ambiguity associated with the term impact: the distinction between impacts, outcomes and outputs can be difficult. It may be proposed that the term “impact” can be used both for short- and long-term consequences. We maintain that it is essential to separate outputs and outcomes: “The outcomes are the difference made by the outputs” (Mills-Scofield 2012).

The aim of societally engaged HEIs is to influence and do good, to help people and society and to make a change in society. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of each higher education institution to safeguard and promote the highest level of integrity and ethical behaviour (IAU-MCO Guidelines 2012). In Finland, the accountability of HEIs to their financiers and to society requires that HEIs understand, evaluate and report their societal impact and view anticipated societal impact as decision-making or evaluative criteria within HEIs when making decisions on future activities.

According to the country reports produced as part of the HEISE project, HEIs consider societal impact highly important. They have established procedures for managing and evaluating societal impact. The interviewees emphasised the need to develop qualitative indicators and to pay more attention to unpredictable and unintended negative and positive impacts. The challenge, however, remains how to evaluate long-term impacts and any causalities.

Societal engagement is an integral part of social interaction and an important prerequisite for HEIs’ societal impact. Societal impact is a consequence of collaborative activities performed with different actors in society and thus has instrumental value. In addition, social engagement activity itself can create value and contribute to societal impact by enabling citizens to participate in development work with creative methods. Hence, societal engagement has intrinsic value (for more see Ateca-Amestoy et al. 2019). In the HEISE project, students used arts-based methods as a means to elaborate on the challenge together with the challenge-owners; that is, organisations and citizens outside their own higher education institutes (e.g. a day-care center and an association for mental health rehabilitees).

ETHICAL ISSUES AND THE VALUE OF ARTS-BASED METHODS IN HEISE CHALLENGE-SOLVING PROJECTS

The social work profession’s core mandates include promoting social change, social development, social cohesion and the empowerment and liberation of people (International Federation of Social Workers 2019). Social workers respect human rights and value the idea of collective responsibility: people should take responsibility for each other and the environment. Moreover, social workers acknowledge the importance of building reciprocal relationships within communities.

In a similar vein, when using arts-based methods in learning or in professional social work, core ethical principles can be described as different rights: self-determination, participation, holistic treatment, privacy

and development of professional skills and personal wellbeing (Talentia 2019). The critical issue is to respect these rights from the beginning of the challenge-based project by listening to every actor's needs and priorities.

HEISE challenge-solving projects are based on the value that citizens are active participants of society rather than objects. HEIs play a key role in educating young people to understand the underlying value systems of society and cultures and in fostering social integration into today's diversified world. HEIs need novel ways to gain knowledge and skills on how to enhance intercultural understanding and a sense of belonging to a community.

Ethical principles and codes of ethics do not always offer direct solutions to dilemmas but rather serve as a guide for reflection (Talentia 2019). Arts-based methods can open up a free space, one without a sense of right or wrong and limitations and preconceptions, thus providing room for open discussions and joint exploration of different phenomena (Känkänen & Bardy 2014).

According to Gladding (2016), arts-based methods enable participation, interaction and cooperation, and they empower people. Arts can create chances to see the challenges and opportunities in one's life through creativity and play. Art provides an opportunity not just to explore new things but also to see familiar things from another perspective (Winner, Goldstein & Vincent-Lancrin 2013) and thus create understanding and enable us to be empathetic.

IMPLEMENTATION OF CHALLENGE-SOLVING PROJECTS

Student teams carried out multiple challenge-solving projects with a variety of stakeholders, such as disabled children, mentally disabled adults, mental health rehabilitees, the elderly, immigrants, multicultural families and children. As an example, student groups used arts-based methods such as music, visual arts, drama and handicrafts to maintain and support the physical capacity of the elderly. The objectives of the challenge-solving projects were jointly agreed on with challenge-owners. A written contract between the challenge-owner, students and their teacher is a good tool in building a joint understanding of the challenge and the different actors' expectations and tasks. Work-life partners were mostly non-profit organisations and associations but also public service providers, such as day-care centres.

When planning and executing challenge-based learning projects with stakeholders in the context of HEISE project, students were asked to reflect on four basic values: responsibility, honesty, respect and fairness (Anttonen et al. 2016, 55–58). These values should form the basis of decision-making and should guide actions in challenge-solving projects.

During the challenge-solving projects, students encountered some challenges, too. For example, in the housing community of mental health rehabilitees, there were different views on the challenge to be solved, and sometimes the students' views were different from that of the rehabilitees. The more time spent in dialogue at the beginning of the challenge-solving projects, the more conflict is prevented during the implementation phase (see more on dialogical approach in Anttonen et al. 2016, 58–61).

One of the major challenges for most of the student teams was to find ways to get those persons who have long been "on the outskirts of our society" involved in the collaborative activities and thus strengthen their feelings of belonging and increase their participation. It takes time to build trust between clients and students in learning projects. Alongside one-off projects, higher education institutions should build collaboration; for example, art-based methods could be used for long-term development. This would allow for responsible co-creation and development, paying attention to the perspectives of all the actor.

As an outcome, arts-based challenge-solving projects created positive impact. Students found that music is a powerful channel for interaction with elderly suffering from memory problems. The same elements were also present in the anti-racism workshops for children and wellbeing workshops with mental health rehabilitees. Different client groups were able to express their thoughts and feelings through creative activities. Arts-based methods were regarded as tools to strengthen interaction between participants. Doing things together with the students created joy and strengthened the feeling of belonging not just to the surrounding community but to society as a whole. Hence, we argue that arts-based methods can strengthen the sense of belonging not only on an individual level but on a societal level.

It can be concluded that arts-based methods enable the sharing of one's feelings and thoughts, even if it had been previously considered impossible. Music and visual arts enable communication and expression for those who have challenges in everyday communication. The most meaningful learning outcome for the students was that arts-based methods do empower people. Creativity can help vulnerable people realise that they can influence the surrounding community. Arts-based methods enable them to be seen and heard and on an individual level improve their functional capacity. The creative activity that takes place in dialogue enables the client to become involved. The customer is seen as a subject and actor, not an object.

REFLECTIONS ON THE MANIFESTATION OF ETHICAL CODES OF THE HEI PRACTICE IN CHALLENGE-SOLVING PROJECTS

The outcome of the HEISE project, the roadmap for societal engagement, will help HEI professionals plan new educational activities to enforce the societal engagement of their own higher-education institutions. Next, based on the above discussion on the implementation and outcomes of the challenge-solving projects, we will briefly elaborate on their alignment with the ethical codes of HEI professional practice following the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education's Statement of Shared Ethical Principles (2015).

Table 1 presents seven ethical principles: autonomy, malfeasance, beneficence, justice, fidelity, veracity and affiliation. The second column provides a brief description of each ethical principle, and the third column provides examples of how each principle was manifested in HEISE challenge-solving projects. The description of each ethical principle relies on the statement released by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2015).

Freedom of choice is a vital aspect in the first ethical principle, *autonomy*. As HEI professionals, we consider individuals responsible for their own behaviour and learning; we hold ourselves and others accountable. Our task is to design learning environments that empower students and other actors to make decisions. HEISE challenge-solving projects are prime examples of such learning environments.

The ethical principle of *non-malfeasance* emphasises that in the collaborative activities with actors outside our own HEI, we, both the professionals and students, must strive for the good of those whom we serve. We act in a manner that respects the rights and property of others without exploiting or abusing power. Following this principle was critical, as most of the challenge-solving projects were implemented with people with impairments or with those who are in vulnerable positions.

All the HEISE challenge-solving projects aimed at promoting wellbeing and empowering people; thus, they were aligned with the principle of *beneficence*. *Justice* refers to actively promoting human dignity and endorsing equality and fairness for everyone. As a novel educational approach, challenge-solving projects planned and implemented by the students and clients foster equality and fairness, simultaneously balancing the power between teachers and students.

Table 1. Examples how the ethical codes of HEI practice (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education 2015) were manifested in HEISE challenge-solving projects.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES	AS HEI PROFESSIONALS...	MANIFESTED IN HEISE CHALLENGE-SOLVING PROJECTS
1. Autonomy	We take responsibility for our actions and both support and empower an individual's and group's freedom of choice.	Students' projects are based on the needs of clients (challenge-owners), thus respecting their right to self-determination. Students, together with the challenge-owners, made decisions on how to proceed with the challenge and which arts-based methods to use. The teacher's role was to support and provide guidance when needed and after the project help the students evaluate the impacts and their own learning.
2. Non-maleficance	We pledge to do no harm.	Special needs of clients were considered; client-centricity was the guiding principle in students' work. When working with citizens with disabilities or impairments or with people in vulnerable positions, special attention was paid to the choice of methods to ensure that the actors would be able to participate according to their own abilities.
3. Beneficence	We engage in altruistic attitudes and actions that promote goodness and contribute to the health and welfare of others.	All the HEISE challenge-solving projects aimed at promoting wellbeing and empowering people.
4. Justice	We actively promote human dignity and endorse equality and fairness for everyone.	Human dignity and human rights were the main focus of the challenge-solving projects.
5. Fidelity	We are faithful to an obligation, trust or duty.	Students followed the ethical code of conduct. Ethical issues were reflected on at HEI during and after the challenge-solving projects.
6. Veracity	We seek and convey the truth in our words and actions.	Transparency was emphasised in the challenge-solving projects. Students documented their projects from planning until the final stage. Project outcomes were reflected on together with the stakeholders.
7. Affiliation	We actively promote connected relationships among all people and foster community.	Building and strengthening relationships with citizens and their communities is at the very core of challenge-solving projects. With the use of arts-based methods, it was possible to foster community and a sense of belonging.

The ethical principle of *fidelity* concerns confidentiality, trust and commitment. Reflective discussions on issues related to ethical codes of conduct were held among students and teachers both during and after challenge-solving projects.

As to veracity, we wish to highlight that students documented project activities from the very beginning until the final stage, thus emphasising *transparency*. The outcomes of the challenge-solving project were reflected on together with all the participants and other stakeholders.

When acting according to the principle of *affiliation*, we create environments that promote connectivity. Using arts-based methods in a group or within a community strengthened the sense of belonging as regards the group or community and the larger society. Moreover, affiliation refers to promoting authenticity, mutual empathy and engagement with human interactions. All the activities of challenge-solving projects were organised at the premises of the challenge-owners (e.g., at youth houses), not at HEI campuses, thus supporting the empathic and authentic approach.

CONCLUSIONS

A team of students was responsible for planning and implementing arts-based activities in close collaboration with the representatives of the challenge-owner. Discussions on the ethical codes of conduct were important during the learning process. Based on our experiences in the HEISE project, we recommend that all stakeholders agree to follow jointly established rules on ethical codes of conduct, research ethics and integrity, copyright and intellectual property rights

We conclude by maintaining that arts-based methods can be used as a means to reflect ethical aspects of the challenge solving projects to empower individuals and organisations. Arts-based methods enable us to deal with delicate situations. They provide a non-verbal means for communicating complex and ethically challenging situations. Through arts-based methods, we can build bridges and promote new ideas.

Moreover, we wish to highlight the need to develop new types of learning environments in collaboration with other actors in society to provide higher-education students authentic and empowering learning experiences. The complexity of our society is continuously increasing; thus, more attention should be paid to strengthening the capabilities of dealing with complexity with profound understanding of ethical codes of conduct.

If seen from a distance, students' challenge-solving projects might seem microscopically small. However, we should not underestimate their impact. Challenge-solving projects not only affect the individuals that take part in them; through the participants, the effects spread to their families, peers and community. For example, discussions of ethical codes of conduct during the planning, implementation and evaluation stages of the challenge-solving project might lead to changes in care professionals' attitudes towards their clients and result in amendments to their work practices. Thus, in affecting one person, we create a positive impact on society.

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