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Teaching Engagement: Reflections on Sociological Praxis

Abstract: Sociology has a long history of engagement with social justice issues, and through concepts like the 'sociological imagination' we equip our students with the ability to think through, and ideally work to change, inequities. This engagement is under threat, however, from recent changes in the higher education sector that have shifted the focus from learning experiences to qualifications. There is little room within accreditation frameworks for social justice as an educational goal. This paper will place these discussions of engagement and social justice as key outcomes of a sociology degree within the broader context of the changing higher education sector, and will explore how we teach students to use their sociological imaginations outside of the classroom. We recognise that this is a messy process, involving ambiguous learning spaces, sometimes conflicting institutional versions of 'engagement' and unforseen outcomes. Nevertheless, 'engaged' sociology should encourage students to exercise their sociological imaginations and their own capacity to act as agents of social change.

Keywords: community engagement, agency, citizenship, engaged sociology, active learning, service learning

Word count: 5907

Introduction

Sociology has a long disciplinary history of engagement with social issues, but we are subjected to the same increasing demands for measurable skills and achievements felt across the higher education sector. The foundation of university-based community engagement is the idea that education is a "public good", a training ground of active citizenship which is

additional to the skills and knowledge gained in a degree. Sociologists ask our students to exercise their sociological imaginations, that is, to see the individual as embedded within social, structural, and historical contexts (Mills 1959). According to Mills, focusing too narrowly on individual barriers to success leads people to feel "trapped" (Mills 1959:3). In contrast, viewing the individual in the context of social structures is "transformative" (Mills 1959:7-8); awareness of historical context is a reminder of "the ever-present possibility of change" (Young 2011:3). According to Mills (1959:226), "the sociological imagination has its chance to make a difference in the quality of human life in our time". Sociologists seek to activate that imagination outside of the classroom, as well as inside, so that students see the world through a more critical lens. We suggest that this is important for sociologists, but also for students from other disciplines; many other areas of study, such as education, psychology and medicine include sociology subjects as an elective unit, or embed some sociological teaching within their own programs, and activating these students' sociological imaginations is an important task.

Our motivation for this paper was our observations of tensions between the agendas of engagement with social change in sociology, institutional engagement, and the push for standardisation and accreditation of the discipline. We argue that an education in sociology should encourage students to exercise their sociological imaginations, and to recognise their own capacity to act as agents of change. Moreover, we feel that students should be encouraged to *exercise* that agency. Given the increasing demands placed on time-poor students, our expectation of engagement is more likely to be met if we incorporate it into our teaching, requiring students to reflect on how sociological theories illuminate real-world experiences. Our paper interrogates the centrality of engagement to sociology as a discipline, and thinks through the effects of standardised "learning outcomes" and "graduate attributes" on engagement. We discuss our own attempts to embed engagement within our teaching

practices, and reflect on the process of activating students' sociological imaginations inside and outside of the classroom.

Context of Engagement: higher education, the community and the discipline

The shifting context of higher education policies and aims and the nature of civic engagement influence sociological praxis. Economic discourse and the concept of the public/private good have shaped debates about higher education policy and in turn position engagement in potentially different ways (Jandhyala, 2008; Labaree, 2007; Nixon, 2010; Tilak, 2008). Higher education is historically a public good with academic, social, political, cultural, economic, ethical and nation-building purposes (Wallerstein 2004). In recent times, higher education can be seen as an increasingly privatised good. This is evidenced by its massification as a commodity with an increasing emphasis on qualifications over traditional, generalist courses of study such as the liberal arts. As Mills (1959:11) suggests, we can identify the major issues and troubles by asking "what values are cherished yet threatened, and what values are cherished and supported, by the characterizing trends of our period". In the discipline of sociology, and as we have seen with our students, engagement and higher education as a public good are cherished, but are under threat from the increasing pressure of accreditation, qualifications, and standardisation.

As a reaction to the "privatization of everything", Michael Burawoy (2004:263) identifies an increasing interest in public sociology which transcends the academy with a focus on social justice and the creation of a better world. Sociology plays a key role in Putnam's (2000) call for higher education to engage citizens socially and politically in response to a perceived civic decline. Flanagan and Levine (2010) argue that higher education has become the central institution for civic incorporation of younger generations.

Civic engagement may be thought of as the traditional forms of community, political and religious participation but it is now also more personalised and abstracted from time and place. The 'online community' and advances in mobile communication have presented new spaces for engagement and for engaging our students (Petray & Halbert 2012). Civic engagement as embedded in foundations of teaching practice positions university as a public good rather than a form of engagement co-opted by market-driven agendas (Winter, Wiseman & Muirhead, 2006). Winter et al (2006:211) argue that "the focus on the local, the community and the applied are a response, even a resistance, to the economic restructuring of higher education" and models of partnership.

Social responsibility or social justice is a dominant ideological basis for much of the education for citizenship, particularly in the arts, social sciences and education disciplines (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill 2007; Jenkins 2012; Rechter et al. 2010). Social justice is "full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs" (Adams, Bell & Griffin 2007:1) Teaching social justice entails "help[ing] people identify and analyse dehumanizing socio-political processes, reflect[ing] on their own position(s) in relation to these processes… and think[ing] proactively about alternative actions given this analysis" (Adams et al 2007:xvii). This parallels the aim of exercising the sociological imagination, "to make a difference in the quality of human life" (Mills 1959:226). Newcastle (2009:12) argues that "increasing social inequality in the last decade has emphasised the importance of reflecting on societal solidarity, and considering the role of education in emancipation and fulfilling societal citizenship".

Sociology has a long history of engagement in social justice, though of course not all sociologists value this engagement. In 1845, Karl Marx wrote that "the philosophers have merely interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it" (p.145). Durkheim wrote in 1893 that societies must be socially just to move towards organic solidarity (Feagin

2001:11). Scholars from outside the white male canon have demonstrated the ways sociology contributes to communities (ie DuBois 1903). The earliest structures of western sociology are built on the idea that sociological research should "serve to improve society" (Friedrichs 1970 in Feagin 2001:6).

There has been consistent opposition to this value-laden view of sociology as a discipline for the greater good (Comte 1848; Bannister 1987). Those who prefer to treat sociology as a science, reliant on detached observation, are particularly critical of engaged sociology. The detached turn in American sociology became prominent in the 1930s (Feagin 2001) and has remained the primary form of academic sociology throughout the United States, the UK and Australia. Burawoy (2004) and Feagin (2001) explore some of the reasons for this: the importance of scientific rigour, instrumentalism, and positivism are key, but so too is the "pursuit of academic credentials" (Burawoy 2004:260).

There have, of course, always been sociologists who focus their efforts on praxis, even when the standard for the discipline was to avoid engagement (Feagin 2001). There is a growing sentiment that some level of engagement is required of the discipline (eg. "Going Public" 2004). This is evidenced by, for example, the focus on engagement by ASA presidents (Burawoy 2004, Feagin 2001), as well as the increasing publications on issues such as service-learning and teaching praxis (see below). One key reason for engaged sociology is an increasing self-critique within the discipline, including a rediscovery of praxis-oriented thinkers outside the traditional canon (eg. Connell 2007). Moreover, sociology must engage with the public, constantly question how things could be better, and imagine alternative futures in order to remain relevant as a discipline (Feagin 2001:6). Many sociologists come to the discipline "looking for meaningful ways to contribute to making a better society" (Feagin 2001:14). Thus, a sociology of praxis will keep students and professional sociologists passionate about our work (Burawoy 2004:274).

Though the values of engagement, social justice, and praxis are cherished by many sociologists, they are also threatened by the massification of higher education and external pressures to standardise, measure and quantify teaching practices. This has developed alongside the shift to education as a private good – students' dispositions toward their qualifications as a commodity rather than an experience of becoming, and new measurements like Threshold Learning Outcomes[1] attempt to make the quality and value of a program directly assessable (Tilak 2008). The TLOs for sociology have been shaped through a consultation process with a discipline that has developed an engaged scholarship alongside scientific method. Despite the constraints of the TLO framework, the TLOs themselves, and the process of consultation to develop them, demonstrate the value placed on engagement, social justice and praxis within sociology.

The development of the TLOs included a six month consultation process. The issue of engagement was important to several sociologists in this process. Raewyn Connell suggested that, in addition to communication, engagement should include "an understanding of the uses of sociological knowledge by communities, social movements, and policy-makers" (TASA 2012a). This takes a more active view of engagement that positions sociology as not just knowledge of the processes of social change and stability but also as *part of those processes.* Jeremy Smith called for engagement to include the "promotion of sociology as public sociology and facilitation of personal and collective change" (TASA 2012a). Sue Rechter called for recognition of the reflexive nature of sociology (TASA 2012a), a key component in the teaching of praxis (see below). The staff at University of Queensland suggested an eighth TLO, that students should "demonstrate an ability to engage with social problems, working in interdisciplinary teams and with the broader community to instigate positive social change"

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[1] The massification and internationalisation of higher education have been drivers for a new regulatory body in Australia. , The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) is responsible for auditing the whole sector to assess quality based on Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs) and the Australian Qualification Framework.

(TASA 2012a). David McCallum raised a similar point, while recognising that this is outside the scope of the TLOs: "What happened to the recognition that sociology, at its heart, is an emancipatory discipline that meant asking 'can this be done better'" (TASA 2012a)?

Ultimately, though, the TLOs were limited by the requirements of the overseeing bodies. Engagement is a term that is used, but the AQF definition of this refers to communication skills. Sociology educators who seek to embed social justice into their teaching might 'read between the lines', and infer praxis-based teaching into the existing TLOs. For example, in the Nature and Extent of Sociology section, sociologists are said to (among other things) "examine the dynamics of power and inequality" (TASA 2012b:5). The first TLO, especially, implies an expectation of students' awareness of social *injustice* as foundational knowledge of the discipline (TASA 2012b:6), but this does not always translate to knowledge about social *justice* or how to achieve it. Skills developed through the study of sociology include collaboration and reflexivity. And there is a focus, within the TLOs, on "application" of theory to "evidence" and "empirically based social research" (TASA 2012b:6). It is possible, focusing on these points, to read the importance of engagement into the TLOs, but as the document points out, they "do not prescribe the ways they shall be achieved" (TASA 2012b:4).

Social justice and engagement are important to many Australian sociologists. The discipline still operates, in large part, from the assumption that the point is not only to understand social problems, but to change them. Though this learning outcome is impossible to standardise and difficult to measure, it is central to the teaching of many sociologists.

Teaching Sociological Praxis

The remainder of this article will look at research into our students and our teaching practice regarding student engagement. We began to examine this because James Cook University (like many institutions) has placed engagement as a central strategic aim, setting out to 'embrace the communities we serve and engage with them at all levels' by inspiring students to 'make a difference in their fields of endeavour and in their communities' (JCU 2013). Encouraging active engagement through classroom practice is a successful means of fostering students' capacity to think sociologically. This includes using 'real world' examples to illustrate concepts and theories, as well as applying those theories to students' own experiences. Teaching engagement may be considered on a continuum from indirect experiences, such as simulations and problem-based learning, to direct experiences. These direct experiences include community-based learning, which involves community members as equal partners in the learning process (McKinney, Howery et al 2004), service learning, where students actively participate in service (Mooney & Edwards 2001), and activism, collective campaigns to bring about social change (Maddison & Scalmer 2006).

Engagement Inside the Classroom

Our teaching has incorporated practices along the 'engagement' continuum which have been the basis of our reflections. Here we couple these reflections with student feedback and formal research. This builds on our previous research about student engagement (Petray and Halbert 2012). Petray introduced several forms of teaching engagement in her sociology subject *Power and Protest in a Globalising World*. A qualitative questionnaire was used to gauge students' opinions about the engagement components, along with formal feedback mechanisms, and many ongoing conversations with students; in a relatively small school, Petray has long-term relationships with many of the students. The questionnaire received 13 responses (37%), so does not claim statistical significance or generalizability. Rather, the responses offer insight into how students understood engagement in their learning

experiences. An online questionnaire was chosen because it allowed students to give feedback privately; the questionnaire was sent out via SurveyMonkey after all marks for the semester had been finalised, which may explain the small response rate.For learning experiences inside the traditional classroom, simulations, case studies, and problem-based learning techniques are effective ways to develop critical reflection skills (Garoutte & Bobbitt-Zeher 2011; Steck et al 2011). Halbert has used classroom-based engagement in her *Education for Cultural Diversity* subject, whereby students had to review and reform school policies and curriculum in a simulated school context. Students took on the role of teachers and worked collaboratively to evaluate current philosophy, organisation and practices documented through a fictional but authentic school website. They then had to develop recommendations and see themselves as agents of change. Thus, they exercise their sociological imagination, as Mills (1959) argued, by linking their personal lives as teachers-in-training with structural issues of state and federal policies. Other examples of classroom-based teaching practices include critical assessment of social policies, writing letters to the editor, and using guest speakers from the community to increase student awareness of local issues and possibilities for engagement (McKinney, Howery et al. 2004; Simpson & Elias 2011). While students do not directly engage with the community in classroom-based learning experiences, they do challenge understandings of their community and their attitudes towards social problems (Steck et al 2011).

In Petray's *Power and Protest*, students learn examples and theories of social movements. Through a range of classroom- and community-based efforts, students were encouraged to take an active role in the community. Early in the semester, guest speakers from five community groups spoke about their groups, the kinds of activism they undertake, and ways for students to get involved. Approximately three months later, students were asked to list the groups they remembered. Of the eight students who answered this question, 6

remembered three groups, and two could not remember any. More importantly in terms of ongoing engagement, three students reported having further contact with at least one of the groups – joining, attending an event, signing up to a Facebook page or an email list – and two have not done so yet but plan to. Even those who have had no contact with the groups reported increased awareness of the local community. The outcomes of this teaching strategy are ambiguous and difficult to interpret as a 'success' or otherwise (see the section on Tensions and Messiness below). But students have learned something from the exercise, and this knowledge might form the basis for future community engagement.

Engagement Outside the Classroom

A more active approach to fostering student agency is community-based learning, which involves community members as equal partners in the learning process (McKinney, Howery et al 2004; Bamber & Pike 2012:5). Community-based learning is an important tool of sociological praxis which enables active learning about the importance of sociological understandings to practical problems. This "scholarship of engagement" positions higher education as a public good (see above) which must be a "vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic and moral problems" (Boyer 1996:19).

Excursions out into the community, volunteer opportunities, and internships offer students the opportunity to see real examples of the abstract concepts they learn in the classroom (Wynne 2006; Mooney & Edwards 2001). Hands-on experience better enables students to understand how structural forces affect individuals (Mobley 2007:126), a key component of a well-developed sociological imagination. In Halbert's subject *Service Learning for Sustainable Futures,* students participate in intensive placements with community organisations to develop their knowledge and skills in responding to social issues. In service learning, individual experiences are inextricably linked with learning outcomes.

Using a curriculum structure of preparation and conceptual understanding, action and reflection, enables students to develop and enact their sociological imagination. A key framework is UNESCO's (2010) Pillars of Sustainability, against which students develop their understanding of social systems and develop projects which further the sustainability aims of the organisation they are working with. Other than the logistical challenge of committing at least fifty hours to an organisation, the feedback about learning was positive. One student commented that a strength of the subject is "the ability to get involved in the community and help others whilst learning valuable information and being able to apply current knowledge".

Successful community-based learning experiences allow students to challenge themselves, reflect on their learning, engage in meaningful participation with communities, and link their experiences to theory (McKinney, Howery et al 2004; Rajaram 2007). Hall et al (2004) found that students learn better, are more motivated, and demonstrate a greater understanding of social issues when they have a personal connection with their community. Service learning is also beneficial to sociology as a discipline, as Burawoy (2004:266) suggests: "Service learning is the prototype: as they learn students become ambassadors of sociology to the wider world just as they bring back to the classroom their engagement with diverse publics". Civic engagement, service learning, or public sociology has been found to combat the sense of hopelessness that often accompanies learning about structural causes of inequality (Johnson 2005). Burawoy (2004:274) suggests that this form of learning and doing sociology should begin early in a sociologist's career, to "ignite the torch of professional sociology". By challenging students to critically assess their everyday realities, and inspiring them to "live in a manner that supports their desire for a more just and compassionate world", sociology educators have the ability to challenge student apathy (Johnson 2005:54).

Many academics aim to raise the awareness of students to social justice issues. One way of getting students to see social injustice, but also to envision alternatives, is through activism (Schwartz 1992). Petray's subject, *Australian Society: An Introduction to Sociology*, encouraged sociological praxis through a social change project (following Netting 1994). Students were asked to identify a social issue which concerned them, and then to do something about it. They then reflected on the concept of social change in light of their experience. Most students approached big issues on a small or local scale, and in their reflections expressed the value of working in this way. This broad scope allowed students to work on projects of interest to them, gave them skills in problem solving as they tried to scale down huge aspirations into manageable projects, and provided an opportunity to reflect on social change processes and barriers. Students directly exercised their sociological imaginations as they used concepts like agency and social change to understand the structural forces affecting their individual actions.

Students responded positively, for the most part, to the praxis-oriented teaching style in *Australian Society*. In formal feedback, students are asked to comment on the best aspects of a subject. For one student, this was "Sociology and looking at things in society from the sociological viewpoint I found very interesting and engaging- although it was a bit of head bender at times too. It was very personally empowering subject for me". Another said that "The content of the subject allowed us to use what skills we had learnt in lectures and readings and apply them to real life situations with a range of hands on projects and tasks." And for another, "the best aspects would have to be the incite [*sic*] it has given me in regards to social issues within the community". Social justice and engagement is still 'cherished' by many students, who felt empowered and engaged as they exercised their sociological imaginations. However, the threat to praxis of measurable outcomes and skills did appear in one review: "As one of those students doing the subject because it is a core subject for my

degree I believe the point of the intro course should be to alert students to the issues in society - discrimination, structural inequality, etc and cover the basic sociological perspectives (Marx etc). The social change project was about turning students into activists - that's not what I signed-up for. I can see it may have been an attempt to make the subject interesting and unique but it didn't seem right to me." The 'issues in society' this student expected to learn about were, in fact, covered in detail in the subject content. It was the addition of an active, engaged component that did not 'seem right' to this student, and we suggest that one explanation for this discomfort was the lack of measurable outcomes from the social change project – the student could not see the relevance to the skills she or he needs upon graduation.

When teaching activism, it is important that the student's reflection is assessed, rather than the success of their efforts. Field diaries, reflective learning journals, and critical essays can make concrete links between theory and practice (Rose 1989; Cornelius 1998). In Halbert's *Service Learning for Sustainable Futures*, project proposals, reflective blog entries and summative presentations and articles are the basis of assessment *for* learning. These tasks prompt reflection on previous engagement with community (and issues of social, economic, political or ecological sustainability), experiences of negotiating their agency and the potentially messy but often rewarding 'outcomes'. In Petray's *Power and Protest* subject, an activism-based assessment project required students to work in groups to organise activism on a topic of their choice. Students were assessed on a presentation on agency and power relations in their activism. In this way, students were not marked on the issue they chose, or on the success of their event, but rather on their ability to link theory with practice. In the online questionnaire, students described their reactions upon learning that their major assessment item involved doing activism, with responses from "Excited" to "Uneasy about it at first" to "That is so out of my comfort zone". These responses were reflective; students

were asked after the completion of the subject to think back to the beginning of the semester, so their reactions may have been mitigated by their experiences during the semester.

This activism-assessment seemed to successfully encourage students to learn about new issues and to engage with community organisations. Topics included animal cruelty, factory farming, refugee rights, corporate development and environmental issues, healthy lifestyles, and crime prevention. In the online questionnaire, six students said their issue was something they were not previously familiar with; four were aware of the issue but had not actively engaged with it; and two were already activists in the area. Of the six student groups, five had direct links to existing organisations, from the RSPCA to Amnesty International to a community crime group. It is less clear how long students will sustain this involvement in community groups. At the time of the online questionnaire, nine said they are 'somewhat' or 'very likely' to continue activism on their issue, and 11 said they are 'somewhat' or 'very likely' to engage in activism for other causes. So there is certainly intent amongst students to remain actively engaged, but this cannot be confirmed without follow-up research.

Given the University's focus on engaging communities, and a further emphasis within the Faculty of Arts, Education and Social Sciences to 'create a better life for people living in the tropics, worldwide' (JCU 2012), we were interested in students' opinions of these goals. In the questionnaire, students were unanimously supportive of the idea. They said that such a goal 'prepares [students] better for life outside of university' and that engagement with community will 'instill a critical minded approach to understanding the issues surrounding the world at large [sic]'. Most importantly for the role of sociology in making students aware of their agency, one student felt that 'this subject is empowering and insightful and encourages students to take an active role in their communities to address issues that directly impact their lives'. In this sociology subject, then, students from a range of disciplines (only

four of 36 were sociology majors) exercised their sociological imaginations through active participation in their community.

Overall, the use of activism as an assessment tool was successful at encouraging students to be active agents in their communities. One student said that she 'would like to become more involved in local activism', and two students responded to Petray's invitation to attend an extracurricular protest rally. Another student said the subject 'teaches that no matter where you are, you can use your power to pressure structures towards what you want'. As opposed to learning this abstractly, through examples and theories, the students were able to gain first-hand experience. Though their activism was not (yet) sustained over a long time period, they gained a glimpse of the issues faced by social movements and communities more broadly when trying to change the status quo. They expressed frustration throughout the semester with the apathy of passers-by to their activism events, they found difficulty getting permissions to hold their events, and they were proud of their achievements. Teaching engagement in this way allowed students to embody the concepts they learned about in the classroom, suggesting that this is a useful exercise in sociological praxis.

Tensions and messiness in engagement

The various forms of teaching engagement are not without their pitfalls. Time poor students, student anxiety over such open-ended experiences, and the limitations offered by community partners are all barriers to teaching engagement (Cornelius 1998; Rose 1989). Aside from problems of resourcing and ability, teaching engagement highlights the extent to which learning outcomes are out of our hands. Butin (2010) claims that service learning makes it possible to dismantle the myth of the stable education experience, the myth of a singular community, and the myth of an agreed-upon justice. Butin's approach is anti-foundational, and the key to his argument is the idea that service learning is a hyper-engaged

and community-based pedagogy that attends to the 'remainder' left after every service learning experience. Service learning is never a transparent activity that accomplishes exactly what the instructor intends – there is always 'slippage or remainder' (Butin, 2010, p. 46). The reason for this slippage, Butin (2010:46) argues, is because "service learning is an embodied and experiential activity ….service learning cannot be a neat/clean cut/statistically significant learning experience which can be clearly measured and shown to be moving students towards goals of greater competence or equity." Butin critiques a teacher-directed, measurable set of learning outcomes as a 'strong overcoming' –and argues it is necessary to speak of a 'weak overcoming' that acknowledges the always inherent slippages and tensions of the service learning practices.

Thus, when we teach engagement, through simulations or service learning or activism, we cannot control the outcomes. There is not a clear correlation between assessable engagement and later participation in community. Dean (2007) suggests that assessable engagement may inspire hope in students and their ability to create change, but will not necessarily create enduring activists outside of the classroom (see also Mobley 2007). Finally, Rose (1989:490) suggests that some students "may not have the emotional strength" – or, perhaps, the desire – "to be nonconformists". As sociology educators, we can encourage engagement at a variety of levels, but we must be aware of the range of possible responses.

Conclusions

There are a range of opinions about the importance of engagement and social justice within the discipline of sociology, but a common starting point of teaching is C. Wright Mills' (1959) 'sociological imagination'. We teach our students to link local problems to

structural explanations. In so doing, we give them the tools to think about doing something about the problems, if they so wish. When students from across the social sciences take up sociological praxis in order to enact their personal and professional agency as citizens, the community benefits. However, in the current context higher education is increasingly positioned as a private good (which needs to be regulated and measured) and sociology as a 'product' just like other more vocational courses. Threshold Learning Outcomes are one example of this. Despite the value placed on engagement through the consultation process, social justice does not fit well within the confines of the AQF definitions. Though some educators might 'read between the lines', the knowledge and skills we measure does not explicitly refer to engagement.

Our own teaching experiences, and those from the literature we discuss above, point to the value of using students' engagement in their communities as a teaching technique. Students themselves report that they appreciate learning by doing, that it helps them to make sense of the concepts and see them in action. A few students did report that they would have preferred to learn the knowledge without putting it into practice, but they are the minority. The majority of students in our study, as well as many academics, cherish social justice and engagement. How we maintain this teaching practice in an environment increasingly focused on measurable skills and attributes remains to be seen.

Experiences of teaching and learning sociology (regardless of where they occur) must equip students to navigate and reflect on the messiness and slippages in engaging with community. Sociology education which is based on praxis will equip our students with an understanding of messiness – that learning outcomes are not neat, cannot be contained within a classroom or a semester, and that things do not always go as planned. In our experience, this came through when students became passionate about a topic that was, in many cases, unimportant to others. When working towards social justice outside of their degrees, students

will encounter similar roadblocks, from apathy to more explicit barriers to success. This is part of the messiness of learning through praxis, and one of the most important learning outcomes is not related to the success of their actions but the attempt. Students learn, through these attempts, how to develop engaged understanding and then link their personal experience to public issues.

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