

Chapter 35

A Liberating Curricula as a Social Responsibility for Promoting Social Justice and Student Success Within the UK Higher Education Institution (HEI)

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ABSTRACT

Integrating corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities as part of a higher education institution (HEI) organisational strategies and practices to address economic and social inequality is no longer a new phenomenon. This promotes increased levels of involvement, choice, and diversity, and is aligned with recent initiatives to widen participation improve representation and promote attainment. CSR may also be encapsulated within frameworks through which HEIs may identify and self-reflect on institutional and cultural barriers that impede minority ethnic (ME) staff and students' progression and attainment. This chapter is informed by discussions concerning CSR within higher education in relation to the aims and objectives of education; student progression and attainment as a university's socially responsible business practice and act of due diligence, to improve representation, progression and success for ME students; curriculum vs. education and the function of a liberating curriculum as a vehicle to enhance academic attainment and promote student success.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR), formerly coined as social responsibility (SR) has a longstanding history, dating as far back as the 1930's (Barnard, 1938; Clark, 1939; McWilliams, Siegel, & Wright, 2006). By virtue of its multidimensional use in a diverse range of settings, primarily among business practitioners and academics, this nebulous concept is viewed as a socially constructed discourse that attracts variances in its definition, dependent upon the lens through which it is viewed.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) outlines their approach to CSR, which is fueled by an "appreciation to balance organizational priorities against [their] social, environmental and economic responsibilities" (HEFCE, n.d.). Equally, the Department for Trade and Industry declares that CSR "is about the integrity with which a company governs itself, fulfills its mission, lives by its values, engages with its stakeholders, measures its impacts and publicly reports on its activities". Berger and Luckman (1996) underlined the complexities associated with the concept of CSR and highlighted the impossibility of achieving an unbiased definition. According to the ISO Business Standards (International Organisation for Standardisation, 2010), CSR offers guidance to organisations, which governs their delivery of ethical, transparent actions that contributes to the health and welfare of society. Essentially, social responsibility dictates accountability or responsibility towards society. Hence, in the absence of an objective methodology for achieving an unbiased, robust definition of CSR (Van Marrewijk, 2003), a contextual approach to defining CSR is often adopted.

The contemporary higher education institution (HEI) operates within a globalised milieu, populated by citizens from a diverse range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This "offers rich potential to develop a sense of global responsibility and citizenship" (Trahar, 2011, v11). HEIs possess a range of social responsibilities (SR) and endeavours to fulfil these purposes by delivering excellence in teaching and learning, then potentially producing graduates for the global economy, who meet the needs of businesses, the industry, employers and their respective professions (HEFCE, n.d.). It is the expectation, that HEIs conduct their business as social institutions, propagating knowledge that develops human capital, advances the legitimate pursuits of the state/nation, promotes individual learning and maintain political loyalties (Gumport, 2000). Similar to other business organisations, universities strive to achieve sustainability, in order to maintain operation and procure adequate funding for current and future initiatives. Hence, universities "cannot be sustainable without being socially responsible"; this entails making higher education accessible to students of all socio-economic backgrounds (International Organisation for Standardisation, 2010).

Given the diversity of student populations in HEIs, the milieu in which they operate and the impact of the curriculum on the overall intellectual/social development of students, it may be naïve to assume that sustainability within the HE sector can be achieved without incorporating a "liberating curriculum" within its CSR strategies. A liberating curriculum is essential to the realisation of a holistic learning experience, as it may be seen as the main instrument to promote cultural competence, retention and success in HE. A Liberating curriculum represents one that aims to "reverse the effects of structural oppression in society" (Collector, 2007). A liberating/liberalised curriculum in this context, is defined as one that promotes social justice and enhances the social, moral, political, intellectual, and spiritual faculties of every student by connecting them with knowledge that prepares them for engaging and making decisions that further the social and political world. It is with this in mind, that universities are challenged to liberate their curricula, in realising their SR.

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