

Student Ambassadors as Actors of Civic Engagement

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Civic university commitment closely relates to its widening participation agenda, engaging students from diverse backgrounds and reducing barriers to their participation in higher education (HE). Student ambassadors play a significant role in addressing inequalities by supporting younger students in developing the relationships, confidence, knowledge, and skills they need to progress to and succeed in HE (Gartland, 2018; 2020). Applying a Bourdieusian lens (Webb et al., 2017) and the theory of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), the paper explores the role of student ambassadors as agents enacting university's civic responsibilities.

The project entitled The Development of Inclusive and Participatory Learning in Organisations through Multicultural Ambassadors (DIPLOMA) brought together academics, teachers, practitioners and students from the UK, France, Turkey and Romania. Its key ambition was to develop inclusive and participatory approaches to student ambassador outreach activity and training. The aim was to more effectively support the educational progression of underserved groups of young people who are currently underrepresented in higher education in the participating countries.

University student ambassadors, academics and other experts working together internationally and locally co-created a range of outreach activities in broad subject disciplines (STEM, Arts, Health and Social Sciences and Humanities) which were subsequently piloted in local secondary schools.

Ambassadors often share similar backgrounds or socio-economic status with school students and can serve as role models, fostering positive attitudes towards career paths and study fields. Moreover, engagement in outreach activities positively impacts student ambassadors' wellbeing, sense of belonging, interest and enthusiasm (Gartland & Negrea, 2022).

Outreach activities enhanced school students' interest in 'big topics' related to Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015) as well as student ambassadors' self-perception as contributors to the university's civic agenda and wider global goals. Universities should regard student ambassadors as key players in achieving their civic pledges.

References

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