HEA Internationalisation Change Programme

Internationalising the curriculum: Approaches to learning, teaching and assessment
University of York

Case Study

Introduction

In 2009 the University of York published its International Strategy, which was followed, in 2010, by a Policy Framework document exploring "what Internationalisation means to York, and (outlining) a strategy for the University to achieve a deep-rooted and rewarding international culture, and global impact in its work." This aim "(plays) directly into curriculum development, making it culturally diverse and internationally focused"; it is the intention of the University "to internationalise the student experience and campus at York" (University of York 2010).

The policy clearly aims to build on and consolidate previously-established strengths: existing links with overseas universities are actively pursued and managed and new links are envisaged; student exchange is strongly promoted and will be expanded; staff and students are recruited internationally and foreign language learning for all students is being widely taken up. Many degree programmes across a wide range of University Departments include international modules or are infused with international content.

Recognising these strengths and the potential for building on them, the internationalisation strategy also states that the University will need "to define the ways in which we will work towards helping our students become 'global citizens': it is a strategy aspiration to bring about "a curriculum and campus which is attractive to UK and international students who will be increasingly active in a global marketplace." (ibid)

In response to this document, The Department of Education in 2011-2 conducted a survey among its staff and students to find out the extent to which perceptions of an internationalised experience were already evident. The result was the realisation that, although much had been achieved, there was room for more intercultural learning, more development of intercultural competence and for a greater recognition of diversity.

A brief review of other Departments showed that there was piecemeal internationalisation of learning and teaching, which was mostly focused on the infusion of 'international' content into modules.

Aspect(s) of the student learning experience the initiative sought to enhance

Against the background of the University's internationalisation strategy, the relatively little evidence of intercultural competence development and the (piecemeal) focus on content-focused approaches to internationalising the curriculum, the initiative set out to explore a way of meeting some of the expectations announced in the policy document.

The intention was to see whether or how, aside from working with international module content, students might gain from each other's indigenous knowledge, develop intercultural communication skills and learn to understand, respect and critique each other's cultural and knowledge bases.

We decided to aim for change in the core curriculum, rather than in the co-curriculum because much was already being achieved in the latter area and because we were aiming for a transformation of the whole student experience: working with the co-curriculum might give the impression that internationalisation is not central. Within the core curriculum, we opted for a 'bottom-up' approach, working directly with students and staff who are involved in daily learning and teaching routines, rather than trying to effect change at programme or Departmental level. This decision was influenced by research evidence reporting experience at other Universities and indicating the centrality of academic teaching staff in bringing about change (Bond 2003, Cleveland-Jones et. al. 2001, Curro & McTaggart 2003). By approaching the area from students themselves, and the staff members teaching them, we hoped that success on the ground would lead to more conviction and more energy higher up.

Approaches and activities developed

We decided to focus our attention on small group work (seminars, tutorials, laboratory group work, PBL sessions) since this seemed to be the area with the greatest potential for allowing students to share knowledge, develop intercultural communication skills and gain a deeper understanding of each other. We were influenced in this decision by the work of De Vita (2007:164) whose suggested approach values classroom diversity and sets out to develop a

> "*challenging hybrid culture where the cultural perspectives and experiences of staff are seen as the material inspiring creation of new practices fostering social inclusion, genuine internationalism and intercultural learning through authentic experiences of intercultural interaction.*"

Our intention was to engage with a core of academic teachers who were keen to fulfil the aims we had set out to achieve and who customarily worked with small and heterogeneous groups of students.

Preliminary sessions

We wanted staff to set aside some teaching sessions before starting their group work proper; we called these sessions 'preliminary sessions'; we provided a range of materials and proposed a range of procedures intended to facilitate communicative group work.

The materials for the first preliminary session consisted of a worksheet intended to help students and staff get to know each other via a 'speedmeeting' activity and another worksheet intended to help them understand how much, culturally, they share and the ways in which they are different from each other. We were guided in this part of our endeavour by the suggestion given in Morey and Kitano (1997) that the first step in what they call 'Multicultural Course Transformation' is to create a climate in the classroom that "honors, respects, and encourages diversity". Myles et. al. (2002) also insist that it has "become essential for faculty to make a deliberate effort to learn about students' cultures and cultural differences and McDowell et. al. (2005) and Carless et. al. (2006) point up the educational significance of the building of learning communities that include both students and staff.

The first worksheet was 'home made' and used a format common in English Language Teaching ("Find Someone Who": see Hadfield 1990) while the second worksheet came from Cranton (2001) (See Resources [1] below).

In the second session, we showed students brief extracts from discussions in which all participants shared a nationality. We invited students to comment on the different ways in which the discussions were handled, pointing out, where necessary, that while some people show respect for others by a 'high involvement' style of participation, others do so by a 'high considerateness' style (Tannen 1992); some discussants make their interventions highly personal, while others tend to depersonalise their opinions. (See Resources [2] below)

Following this exposé, we asked students to consider a list of factors which might contribute to unsuccessful group work. Students were required to tell each other of any experiences they might have had of these factors and then to suggest to each other ways of avoiding them or repairing things if these factors arose. The list, similar to those found in handbooks to help students towards effective discussions, came from the work of Gilbert at the University of Hertfordshire (see Resources [2] below)

Group work practice

Following these preliminary sessions, we wanted to help participating staff to organise group work in ways which were conducive to intercultural communication and to organise heuristic discussions with students, intended to help them reflect on how they were interacting with each other and how they might draw more benefit from their group work activity.

We suggested to participating staff that they experimented with different formations during group work: they might arrange students in pairs, threes or fours before inviting the whole group to work together. We also suggested having students work in a group without a staff member being included: the staff member might stimulate the group from time to time with propositions but leave discussion to the students' initiative.

We were occasionally present during group work and took field notes, including diagrams showing interaction patterns, to help students in their heuristic discussions, immediately following the observed sessions. An example of field notes and diagram is given in Resources [3].

In the heuristic discussions, students were invited to look at the list of factors contributing to unsuccessful group work and to their own suggestions for making things more effective. They were asked to talk about how they thought they were progressing. The field notes and diagrams were used when appropriate to help students reflect on aspects of their group work.

Assessment

Finally, we wanted to help members of the academic teaching staff to explore and implement ways of rewarding, through the assessment regime, successful intercultural communication.
A brief extract from an assessment schedule is shown in Resources [4] below.

Key Achievements

The initiative achieved limited success; or rather it achieved unmitigated success in one Department (Department X), moderate success in another (Department Y) and raised interest in several others.

Department X already used Problem-Based Learning as a core activity and already had a module with an international orientation. This, together with very willing and collaborative staff members, laid an excellent foundation for the initiative. All phases of the initiative were successfully implemented. Students completed, and showed marked enthusiasm for the preliminary sessions, group work was effectively organised and heuristic discussions, based on feedback from group work, allowed students to further enhance their interactions. Departmental staff produced an assessment strategy which included rewarding effective interactions.

In Department Y, the preliminary sessions were successful in bringing about effective intercultural communication among students. Well-handled group work and on-going discussion with students over the nature of their interaction led to enhanced communication. This was not, however, followed up with changes to the assessment regime and the initiative was not seen in such a central way as it had been in Department X, partly because the module involved was not perceived as an 'international' one.

Several other Departments showed an interest in the initiative, leading to possible future activity.

Impact

The impact of the initiative in Department X was clear: students were asked to discuss, as a group, the extent to which they had had an international experience throughout the module. In filling out a feedback sheet, reporting their discussion, they wrote that they considered their learning experience to have been internationalised to a large extent, claiming that the experience had led to; (See Resources [5])

- an improvement of knowledge,
- learning how research in their area is carried out in other countries,
- knowledge of 'home' systems by contrasting them with others,
- improved language skills
- cultural awareness and learning generally about other countries.

The same measurement procedure used in Department Y gave varied responses: perhaps, because students did not perceive their module to be an 'international' one, they did not necessarily connect their successful intercultural communication to a wider internationalisation context.

Other Departments used knowledge of the initiative to set up workshops with staff and with research students embarking on teaching activities.

The initiative is to feature in the University's annual Learning and Teaching conference.

Lessons learned

Even small-scale change takes a great deal of effort and commitment, relying on those who are enthusiastic in the first place. Universities have embedded, entrenched systems which cannot be changed overnight or even over a year, or, possibly, even over longer periods.

In an initiative designed to take one year only, a realistic plan needs to be hatched: in this case, we could have spent the year simply designing materials and procedures, which could then have been extended to included better measurement tools, investigating Departments for evidence of 'international' modules, exploring ways of engaging staff members and ways of helping people make creative use of their limited time.

Next steps

We have decided to approach the University's Professional and Organisational Development team with a view to looking at how to involve more staff members in replicating the stages of the initiative, perhaps with modifications.

We will continue to liaise with those Departments who showed an interest but who did not participate actively in the initiative.

We have attracted the attention of a newly-appointed International Relations Officer, whose remit is to investigate the internationalisation of the curriculum; we will try to work closely with him in order to explore possible 'top-down' actions, to complement the 'bottom-up' approach we have taken and will continue to take.

Key messages

Enthusiasm for learning and teaching is key: staff for whom teaching is a chore may have to wait until a directive requires them to change their practice.

We are asking enthusiastic staff members to look at what we have achieved and to look at whether or how they might do something similar. Our request is simply that they change some of the ways in which they work with small groups of students and that, when renewing modules, they give thought to their assessment procedures.

By making small changes in these areas, we think we can help the University to achieve its goal of providing a student experience worthy of the 'international' tag.

Resources

1. Preliminary sessions – First session

Worksheet One: Find Someone Who…

Stand up and move around the room, stopping to talk to someone. Use the 'Find someone who….' activity to start to get to know people. If you get a 'yes' answer to your questions, follow up and find out more!

Find someone who….

…. has never eaten something which you have often eaten
…. knows more or less how many books he or she has read
…. speaks more than two languages or dialects
…. would happily move to a different country as a permanent resident
…. learned a lot from a grandparent
…. can recite a short piece of poetry or prose by heart
…. has spent more than three days without talking to anyone
…. can explain Einstein's theory of relativity
…. has a significant personal experience of the effects climate change
…. knows where her or his clothes were made, that he/she is wearing now

---

Worksheet Two: Important Values and why you hold them

Look at the list of values in the box and choose ten which are very important to you.

Table 2   Examples of Values

Personal values:

Knowledge	Independence	Love
Meaning	Trust	Openness
Courage	Integrity	Comfort
Adventure	Inner peace	Equality
Happiness	Pleasure	Relationships
Self-esteem	Compassion	Religion
Honesty	Beauty	Possessions
Self-actualization	Development	Empowerment

Professional values:

Security	Autonomy	Effectiveness
Job satisfaction	Achievement	Money
Being with others	Success	Recognition
Expertise	Responsibility	Cooperation
Stability	Competence	Power
Quality	Hard work	Loyalty
Efficiency	Authority	Being liked
Social change	Growth	Learning

Source: Cranton (2001, p. 23).

Cranton (2001) "Becoming an Authentic Teacher" Malabar FL: Krieger Publishing

Prepare to tell another participant how you think you came to have such values.

---

2. Preliminary Sessions – Second Session

Extracts from discussions

Can   Well I think we def, we definitely need a pretty good place for it and, be impressive. And so we definitely need to make sure everything is clean and decorated-

Dol   Uh-hum

Can   nice looking.

Dol   Uh-hum

Can   You know. And maybe new furniture, some flowers, you know,   stuff like that. Just-

Dol   We could (….) De Havilland. It's new.

Can   Yeah. But it's still dirty.

Dol   And flowers would go in with like the banquet, things like that, we could make it look nice but-

Can   Because the food would be decorative.

Dol   Decorative food..food with flowers on it.

Mil   I completely agree with Julie. We do need cameras, but we need them to be filming cameras.
       We need to film this-

Sin   Film?

Mil   so that we can remember exactly what happened. Because people-

Dol   Oh, like document it?

Suk   So what do you think? How much you need to spend for that?

Pra   Exactly I don't know at the moment but it should be around three to four thousand pounds, somewhere around that-

Suk   And, uh, what about you?..

Pra   Well, it might cost more than s, five six thousand pounds. It's just a guess. Three to four might, might go to four five or six. As you said we..our budget is only half and seven, you have to decide what to do with the-

Shr   I think the special security as (…) cost you about five thousand, so you lose then seventy percent of your budget on the security.

Suk   But you guys know we have to spend only seven thousand five hundred pounds;

Fan   Mmmm, I think uh, we should spend uh, one thousand pounds to uh, invite uh, VIP to uh, see films, see films in our university.

Xin   Good. I think I will spend about two thousand pounds uh, to hold a tea party to welcome this VIP and uh, if this visit goes well I mean uh, it finished successfully, the staff and security guards will get a reward. This sum of money should be two thousand pounds and I will give two thousand pounds to the VIP as cash, so he'll be very happy and I'm going to be very happy.

Various Laughter

Fan   But I think uh, uhm, spend two thousand pounds uh, is very very ch. uh, expensive and I think it's only uh, one, one thousand pounds or one thousand five hundred pounds to, to give a tea party, tea party to welcome VIP.
       It's my opinion.

Xin   Oh, give the person one, one thousand - Oh yeah.

Pin   I suggested two thousand, between two thousand and three thousand pounds to the tea

party because it's a very important part for us to welcome them and uhm food and drinks are necessary and it may be we can invite some band to give us some show. It'll be, it'll be nice.

Kar   So basically you think that we, we should use more money on decoration than on security?
Ger   Yeah.
Hed   Well if you're using ten thousand on decorations..(laughter)…and repainting the school, isn't it more important that people hear him when he comes to conference? (Laughter).
Bir   And he's..but he should feel we..welcome. I mean I think that's…
Ger   Well, yeah, maybe, maybe er, maybe we should just spend five thousand on, on fresh flowers (laugh) and..yeah.
Kar   Well I think you can decrease your amount of money from the budget because you don't need four thousand on everything and you n, don't need….
Hed   They wouldn't be sure
         I didn't say five thousand I said four thousand and I still feel that's really important.
Kar   You know that's not that expensive and you don't need…chairs for every..
Hed   Yeah of course it is…

Worksheet Three: Why discussions go wrong – and how to keep them on track

Work on your own and look at the list of things which might go wrong in discussions.

1. People talk a lot so that others do not get many chances to speak.
2. People talk in the silences when the shyest students are getting ready to speak.
3. People fix eye contact with the tutor only, or with just one other student and forget to look at all the other people in the group.
4. People use difficult language; they do not explain difficult words or expressions so that other people in the group cannot understand
5. People do not listen carefully to other peoples' ideas
6. People do not help other people when they are getting into difficulty while they are speaking. Instead, they take control and their chance to speak away from them.
7. People do not thank others for their contribution, and do not invite others to speak.
8. People do not speaking at all; becoming 'too shy' and so giving nothing to the group.
9. People do not even read a little bit in order to bring something to the discussion.
10. People let other people talk and talk without interrupting them.
11. People let other people use difficult words or expressions or allow them to speak too fast for everyone to understand them.
12. People do not ask for more explanations when understanding is becoming too difficult.
13. Other: ……………………………………………………………………..

Prepare to talk to other students about your experience of any of these.

Prepare to discuss ways for the group as a whole to prevent these things from happening

3. Group work Practice

Interaction diagram example
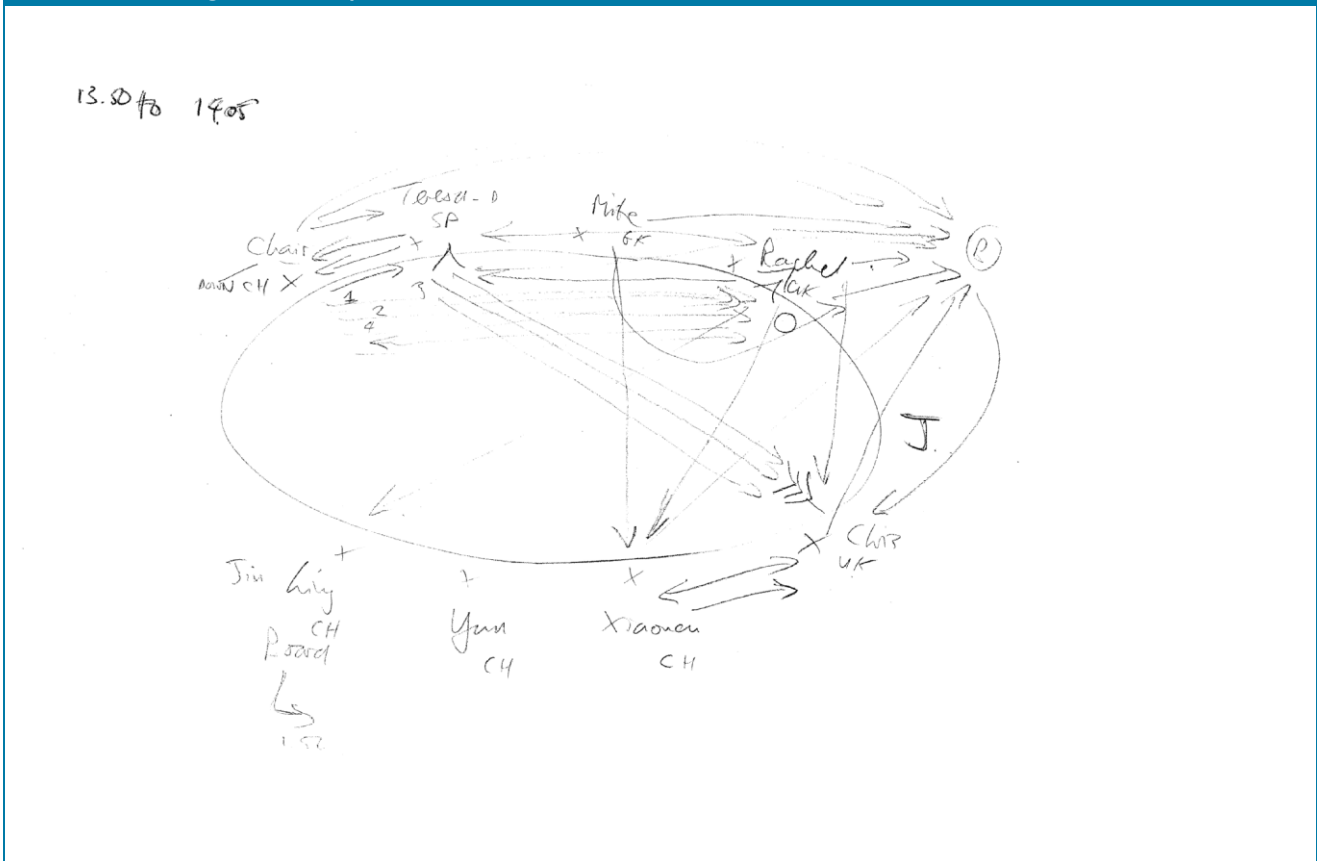
Sample field notes:

"*Some students try hard to accommodate to others, using clarifying moves and maintaining eye-contact until feedback is received. Others are much less skilled at this.*"

"*As the session progressed, interaction became more effective: students asked for repetition and clarification, Chair invited participants to speak and found that erstwhile non-speakers had good input to offer, Chair started to use names.*"

"*There was very little acknowledgement of individual interventions: one participant showed her appreciation of others' input but in general there was little expression of support and encouragement within the group*".

4. Extract from Assessment scheme

Marking criteria – PBL work on WIKI and blog	
Overall contribution to the group's learning experience (for example, supporting, critiquing and challenging the position that others have taken; or in other ways building on and/or developing the work of others)	Mark
The student always demonstrates a positive and constructive attitude in their manner of contributing to the group's learning experience The reasons for the interventions and any agreement or disagreement with other students' work are always relevant, properly evidenced and explained in a way that should be clear and understandable to all the other students in that group All interventions fully reflect the overall MLOs	Starred distinction (80%+)

5. Feedback discussion summary

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

Small Group Work Internationalisation Initiative, 2012-13.   Term 1 end-of-term survey

Please address the following three questions. Address the questions as a group, assigning one or two members to take notes.

1. To what extent do you consider your current experience in **Department x** at York to be international/ised?

    Considerably (on a scale of 1- 5 with 5 being the highest level, comments ranged from 4 – 4.5 to 6!)

2. Please give examples of what you consider to be international/ised experienced within your current **Department X** experience.

    Improved my knowledge of other legal jurisdictions
    Learning how to research law from other countries
    Helped me to know more about my own legal system by contrasting it with others
    Improved my language skills
    Cultural awareness – (eating food that I would not usually do)
    Learning generally about other countries

 If you have taken notes electronically, please e-mail to teamleader@york.ac.uk

 If you have taken notes on paper, please hand in to your Departmental Administrator, headed: Team Leader, Education.

References

Bond, S. (2003) "Untapped Resources". CBIE (Canadian Bureau for International Education) Research, Millennium Series - N° 7 2003

Cleveland-Jones, M., Emes, C. & Ellard. (2001) "On being a social change agent in a reluctant collegial environment" *Planning for Higher Education* 29 (4)

Cranton (2001) "Becoming an Authentic Teacher" Malabar FL: Krieger Publishing

Curro, G. & McTaggart, R. (2003) "Supporting the Pedagogy of Internationalisation" Paper presented at the 17th IDP Australian International Education Conference, 21 – 24 October, Melbourne

De Vita, G. (2007) "Taking Stock: An appraisal of the literature on internationalising HE learning". In Jones, E. & Brown, S. *Internationalising Higher Education* London: Routledge. pp 154-166

Gilbert, T. (2010) "Enhancing Inclusivity in the HE discussion group: strategies for employability, internationalisation and assessment in a UK university" UK-India Education and Research Initiative Conference 2010

Hadfield. J. (1990) "Intermediate Communication Games" London: Longman Pearson

Tannen, D. (1992) "That's Not What I Meant!: How Conversational Style Makes or Breaks Your Relations with Others" London, Virago Press.