

Transformative learning and internationalisation of the curriculum in Higher Education

Addressing the different needs of students
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Background story to internationalisation

- Dramatic demographic changes in the cultural and linguistic diversity of people are occurring in many nations. These changes have challenged higher education institutions to modify their curricula and instructional strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners (Morey, 2000).
- Technology exposes learners to multiple life-worlds and media/sources making diversity more immediate (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009).

Myths about internationalisation

- **MYTH 1: An international curriculum is about teaching international students**
- **MYTH 2: An international curriculum is a specialist course**
- **MYTH 3: One module taken in a degree programme suffices**
- **MYTH 4: Adding a few international materials to a course provides global perspectives**
- **MYTH 5: Some disciplines are already international**

(Clifford, 2005)

Some principles that should
underpin internationalisation
of the curriculum

Internationalisation at home

- IaH represents a significant shift in the drive to internationalise the research, teaching and services of Higher Education. It focuses not on the students who are already mobile ('international students') but on the students and staff who are not.
- Internationalisation at home is about promoting an international experience for all students and staff but specifically for those who have not travelled beyond their own institution to new contexts (Teekens, 2000).

A complex picture

Intercultural interaction in groups in HE should not be seen as a binary of 'self' and 'other' but as a complex site of struggle and tension

Need to move away from binaries:

- 'home' vs 'international'
- 'western' vs 'eastern'
- 'individualist' vs 'collectivist'

Rethinking culture

- Small cultures and large cultures (Holliday, 1999)
- Cultures as communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991)
- University and the cultural 'third space' (Bhaba, 1994): a place where many small cultures meet
- *'cultures are dynamic systems which are constantly renegotiated and cultural meaning is created through the interaction of speakers/writers'* (Finkbeiner, 2005).

and questioning the role of language

- Language at university as a site of tensions and ‘neo-racism’ (Lee and Rice, 2007)
- Now ‘native speakers’ are no longer born into monocultural or monolingual contexts – the myth of the native speaker (Kramsch, 1998)

‘In our days of frequent border crossings and of multilingual foreign language classrooms... I propose that we make the intercultural speaker the unmarked form and the infinite of language use, and the monolingual, monocultural speaker a slowly disappearing species or nationalistic myth’ (Kramsch, 1998: 30).

transformative learning

- a contested concept: a 'theory in progress'
- based on established concepts and theories
- 'paradigm' (Kuhn, 1962)
- 'conscientization' (*conscientização*) or critical consciousness (Freire, 1970)
- central role of discourse in validating beliefs (Habermas, 1984)
- Teachers as intellectuals (Giroux, 1988)

what is transformative learning?

- One of the leading proponents of transformative learning, Mezirow (2003:58) describes the concept as:

‘learning that transforms problematic frames of reference – sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)- to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective...’

'critical reflection'

- Students/learners (adults*) are challenged to assess their value system and worldview identifying 'problematic' ideas, beliefs and values through critical reflection (Taylor, 2000).
- Mezirow (1991) focuses on the development of the autonomous thinker other writers stress the process, the social experience, and the dialogic discussions that arise from critical thinking as essential to challenging perspectives (Brookfield, 2005).

new globalised university contexts

- contemporary universities are a place where cultures (and so perspectives) meet
- ‘increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity’ is a facet of university learning contexts (New London Group, 1996, p. 60)
- transformative learning may be a way to challenge established or accepted ways of thinking

transformative learning – as flawed?

- political and idealistic?
- divorced from disciplines and knowledge?
- positionality: arising from ‘Western’ frames of reference?

Let's try it out!

- In 2008 we designed an online course about internationalisation of the curriculum for university educators - based on principles of transformative learning (for them and their students)
- Used Kitano's (1997: 18) framework of '*exclusive, inclusive and transformed*' levels of multicultural curriculum change (in content, dynamics, assessment)
- aimed at moving beyond curriculum redesign to encouraging development of a 'philosophy' by challenging participants to critically reflect on transformative learning and how it could be used in their academic context

the research

- Longitudinal study gathered data over 5 years through 6 iterations of the course since 2008
- 109 teacher/educators working in universities in 9 different countries from across the world
- Data generated from online discussions between participants and tutors
- Data thematically analysed using data-driven coding
- Codes and themes developed (and 'reliability' supported by inter-rater analysis – i.e. by more than one person independently)

Analysis is a work in progress!

- *This presentation is mainly based on one iteration of the course and provides an initial snapshot of the findings – forthcoming article in Higher Education Quarterly 2014 uses data from two iterations of the course

19 participants from UK, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands and Columbia

11 academics from politics, architecture, science, medicine, law, business, physiotherapy, French, English Language, Communication and the Media

8 from management, teaching and learning 'developers' or other 'non-academic' roles

the focus

- wanted to find out about the ways in which university educators negotiated cultural, linguistic and disciplinary contexts in order to provide internationalised, transformative learning experiences for their students
- What did we find?

idealistic and radical?

- teachers had idealistic and ambitious views of what they wanted to achieve with their students
- Higher education should *'empower students to become agents of change in their own lives and in society'*
- Internationalised education could offer students an *'awareness of self, of their own strengths and prejudices'* and new ways of thinking
- *'students [should] decide what should be learnt, how it is to be learnt and how assessed'*

University education should be transformative ?

- At the political level, some saw the ultimate goal as students becoming active 'global citizens' concerned with, and taking action on, such ideals as social justice, equality and social responsibility:
- *'Indeed where else would the 21st century graduates learn about this if not at the university to enforce their sense of ethical values'*

The bad news...?

- Transformative learning was not seen by the participants as endemic in higher education and saw it as requiring **change** at all levels of the organisations
- Institutional level
- Programme/course level
- Pedagogy

Institutional level

- teachers felt 'instructed' by policy/strategy and that they had 'no control'

I think I'm still struggling with suppressing the cynicism I feel when I read my university's internationalisation strategy, and yet know that we need this commitment in words, and hopefully in actions, at the institutional level, in order to underpin and support change on the individual level. You can't bring about cultural change if it's only coming from one direction, and I think it's about cultural change - or else, it becomes just a bit of tweaking here and there.

Programme/course level

- The participants saw transformative learning as requiring a re-conceptualisation of the whole curriculum, aligning aims, teaching and learning strategies and assessment processes.

‘The aim would be that students live the course rather than endure it’

academic disciplines

- higher education is wedded to the discipline knowledge that currently is the curriculum
- *‘I can’t imagine as to how a curriculum team would give up the mantra that ‘discipline’ is the most important facet in a curriculum’*
- *‘The problem with accounting and finance is the need to learn a good deal of basic technical building blocks before discussion can be widened into a more critical investigation...however, some opportunities exist’.*

inclusive but not transformative?

- *As a departmental group we have always insisted that we expect more from our students... and that a university education should be more about students enquiring and developing their own models of the world. We also teach that accounting is socially constructed, but we don't ask what the impact of culture is on the outcome of that construction. The transformative approach seems to involve another step.*

Pedagogy – teacher student relationships

- Teachers saw the teacher-student relationship being crucial to the process of transformative change.
- But questioned student ‘readiness’ to allow roles to change - saw students as being *‘extrinsically motivated to participate in tertiary education’* and *‘wanting to gain a correct answer to [a] problem’*.
- *‘My College is a private provider and expensive too! So to start with, the students think that they haven’t come from the other end of the world and paid all that money for them to contribute texts, ideas and reflections. They haven’t come here either to listen to their peers. They have come to hear from the specialist!’*

Ready for change in power relations?

- *‘The level of transformation will be determined firstly by how open [students] are to ‘other’ ways of doing things, cultural ideas, concept and processes, and secondly by how the [students] relate to the power relations implicit between the dominant culture that their lives and the teaching lie within and are encompassed by, and the subjugation (or hopefully acceptance) of the ‘other’ culture within the students’ worldviews. And then of course there is the power relationship of teacher/student to consider’.*

positionality of teachers

- As well as their own cultural biases and the embeddedness of their western perspectives (how do you teach outside your own perspectives?) the participants were concerned about their levels of skills and knowledge

‘even assuming an appropriate level of broadmindedness, how do we treat very sensitive subjects in the classroom? What do we do if we disagree with the values being exhibited by others? This requires the acquisition of particular skills.’

Personal change of the teacher

- Teachers noticed their own need for transformation, to become *'reflective and critical teachers and to look at how we view the world as individuals, how we respond to it and act within it'*
- *'Until now I have not consciously reflected on my own degree of internationalisation to any great extent in how the concept relates to me personally and professionally and therefore developing an understanding of how this may affect my practice'.*

Institutional or internalised change?

- *‘The thing that is constantly striking me about the notion of IoC is how internalised much of it is. The changes that really need to occur are initially internal i.e. shifts in how we view the world as individuals, how we respond to, and consequently act within it.’*

Theory to practice?

- the excitement of philosophising soon dissipated when the teachers were asked to consider the possibility of enacting the theory in their practice
- Issues: dominant political context and current political exigencies, entrenched institutional norms, the culture of disciplines, the positionality of teachers and students and our own lack of imagination to envisage new ways of being and of teaching

'set up for an age long gone'?

- *'From the perspective of influencing change, the challenge will be to overcome resistance that is deeply rooted in some of our institutions that were set up for an age long gone. However, if the purpose of university education is to interrogate and challenge old paradigms of knowledge to build new knowledge and ways of knowing then IoC [internationalisation of the curriculum] need not sit in contrast but rather be considered a natural development of a dynamic institution'.*

2013 iteration of the IoC course!

- Online course run through Oxford Brookes University
- Small cost
- 5 weeks completely online tutored by CM/VC
- Attended by academics from across the world
- See webpage:
- http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsld/online/international_curriculum/