

JOURNEY TOWARDS CULTURAL COMPETENCE: DEVELOPING UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

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Purpose - This paper examines the importance of intercultural training for lecturers; describes innovative training to address this, based on a new theoretical framework; and evaluates training and framework.

Background - UK HE is becoming increasingly internationally diverse. The UK HEI population is also very multicultural. The proportion of lecturers who come from outside the UK has risen. It is, therefore, important that students develop intercultural awareness. One way of doing this is to work with students. A more sustainable approach focusses training on lecturers who will embed cultural awareness into their practice.

Method - This paper sets out a theoretical framework which underpins training developed for lecturers as part of a Postgraduate Certificate.

The paper describes the training and evaluates the effectiveness of this.

Findings and results - Findings show that participants were apprehensive about the training. Afterwards they expressed surprise at the participative approach, but were pleased with outcomes. They enjoyed the exercises and the training appeared to have opened up their outlook. They praised the freedom to share thoughts with others.

Conclusions - Findings show that participants learnt intercultural skills to use in class. This was due to the design. The nature of the training encouraged reflection on cultural diversity and participants attested to the effects this would have on their teaching. These results replicate other studies

Implications - The implications are immediate in the design of intercultural training in different contexts. It has already been used to design innovative training for students and managers. In both cases the same far-reaching results were achieved.

Category of presentation: Research paper

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INTRODUCTION

UK higher education is increasingly becoming diverse. In 1996/7 the total number of non-EU students at UK HEIs was 109,940, whereas ten years later this more than doubled to 239,210. The UK HEI population is also very multicultural (see HESA, 1998 and 2008). Similarly, the proportion of lecturing staff from outside the UK in British higher education institutions has risen.

At the same time, the world of work has become more global and developments in travel, technological communication and mobility have led to change in the global employment market (Ready, 2008 and Foster, 2008). It is, therefore, important that students are helped to develop an awareness of cultural differences and an outlook which will help them manage this constructively, both in their studies and when they graduate (Butt, 2007, Holmes, 2005). Kilpatrick et. al. published their frame of reference for intercultural education in 1949, but it is only in recent decades that its full implications have been apparent in the UK HE context.

One way of addressing this need is to work with students on intercultural training programmes. Previous work by this author (Higson, 2008 and Higson, 2010 in preparation) examines the effectiveness of offering intercultural training to students, using a similar intervention to that analysed in this paper. This work, however, indicates that such approaches

are not as sustainable as focussing training on teaching staff who would then embed their newly gained cultural awareness into practice, and amongst their students (Volet and Tan-Quigley, 1999; McAllister and Irvine, 2000). Teekens (2003) highlights the need for such approaches and the lack of previous attention to teacher training for the intercultural classroom. Harman (2005) goes further and in his review of the Australian literature on internationalisation and higher education notes that 'there is almost a complete absence of material on the active involvement of academics in internationalization...' (p.131). This view emphasises the importance of initiatives, such as those which are the topic of this paper.

It is important that such work is research informed. This paper sets out a theoretical framework which underpins training developed for new teaching staff as part of a compulsory Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice. The framework seeks firstly to encompass the needs of home (UK students) and staff, whose cultural experience is often not great (Herzfeldt, 2007); secondly, the needs of overseas students and staff who bring a mixture of learning approaches which can enhance the cultural experiences of their home colleagues and should not merely be regarded in 'deficit' to UK learning approaches (Ippolito, 2007); and finally, the needs of a very complex complete learning community which should not be stereotyped, but bring a range of 'stories' with them (Welikala and Watkins, 2008).

This paper describes the training intervention which was developed on the basis of this framework, and evaluates the effectiveness of this training.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As mentioned earlier, until recent years there has been little concentration in the literature or in practice on the training of academic staff as a method of preparing students in an intercultural classroom (Ismail and Hull, 2001; Tamkin et. al., 2002; Bodycott and Walker, 2000). There has, however, been much work on approaches to training students. The underlying principles on intercultural learning approaches are the same for both constituencies and this is why the author of this paper uses the theoretical framework set out below as the premise to all such interventions. This literature review will, therefore, concentrate on the literature that focuses on preparing academic staff for intercultural training and the section on the theoretical framework will look more on intercultural awareness generally.

For Rogers-Sirin and Sirin (2009) the need to ensure that teachers are culturally competent is 'a professional requirement, not a personal choice' (p.19). In order to test their view they devised a training intervention and, as with this study, carried out pre- and post-tests to find out how effective the training had been. The result, as with this research, was very positive. Participants showed more cultural competence after completing the workshop. This study used both a self-report methodology and a behaviour-based measure. Badley's (2000) work explores just what global competence is in university teaching. He follows this up by asserting that discipline knowledge and teaching skills are not enough for globally competent teachers. In addition you need a 'transformatory' approach to education.

Amongst those realising the importance of training staff, Teekens is a front-runner, particularly in her 'Profile of the Ideal Lecturer for the International Classroom' (2000 and the development of this in 2003). She has been followed, for example, by Butt (2007) within leisure and tourism, Traversi and Fabi (1998) within Italian schools and Stone (2006) more widely within universities. These authors present projects to help teachers build up their ability to teach intercultural groups. Nash (2007) asserts that cultural competence training should be an integral part of the curriculum for staff and students.

Like Teekens, Resnick (2006) and Olson & Kroeger (2001) aim to develop very specific sets of competencies to guide teachers in teaching multinational student groups. The latter's approach uses research which comes to the same conclusions as Herzfeldt (2007) (part of the underpinnings of the theoretical framework in this paper). Olson and Kroeger (2001) found that the number of cultural experiences which teachers had had (including a second language and experience teaching overseas) increased their ability to teach to mixed international groups. A similar finding is expressed in Walker et. al. (2007), in a study which puts forward the need to develop 'moral literacy' in schools and colleges, and by Abdullahi et. al. (2007) in their study of library staff. Ziegler (2007) takes Herzfeldt and colleagues' approach one step further. She agrees that the more direct encounter with different cultures, the better, but also thinks that reflection on these experiences is essential. The implication of this is that true intercultural learning is only achieved via a solid strategy and programme, one which facilitates deep reflection. Conway (2008) concurs that effective intercultural competence training for staff must be highly interactive and Monthienvichienchai et. al (2002) adds that communication competence is essential. This is another reason why the innovative training intervention used in this research was developed.

A feature of the new approaches to teaching and learning mentioned above, and one which is central to the current study, is the need to break away from traditional learning and teaching methods, and to find new approaches and new means of expression. It was for this reason that the research in this paper is based on interventions using the arts. Bar-Shalom et. al. (2008) also identify the need to abandon old methodologies in order to develop new models and discourse. They identify the ramifications and discomfort which such approaches can bring, many of which are mirrored by the reactions of the teacher-participants in this study. Critical self-assessment and re-evaluation is clearly a necessity and a pre-cursor to effective change (Hurtado et. al., 2008; He and Cooper, 2009).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework which underpins this paper is based on three previous studies described below (see Table 1).

Herzfeldt (2007) investigated cultural competence amongst undergraduate students. Her research showed that the effectiveness of an individual to work in international group situations increased incrementally with the number of international or intercultural experiences that person engaged in. In summary, anyone who has studied foreign languages or has spent time studying or working abroad will be a more effective international learner than those who have never been abroad or studied another's culture. According to these criteria many students, from the UK in particular, lack cultural experience. This low cultural competency has a negative impact on group and collaborative work, and on the student and staff experience. At the very least, it is not maximizing students' learning experience. For this reason it is important to increase the opportunities for cultural experiences. This may be by making extra-curricula language tuition available, arranging study trips abroad or ensuring that students have the opportunity of experiencing the kind of innovative intervention which is the subject of this paper.

The theories underpinning Herzfeldt's study, and thus this research, is the theoretical model of cultural learning developed by Yamazaki and Kayes (2004) and based on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning. Such developmental learning increments over time, as the participants gradually learn about different cultures; getting used to varying norms and building up new forms of behaviour. This links with the second set of theories underpinning Herzfeldt's work;

that of personality (Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee, 2002). Her research suggests that those who have more cultural experiences not only operate more effectively in intercultural situations, but also develop a greater 'multicultural personality' (specifically open mindedness and social initiative). Their ability to reflect on life in general is increased.

Importantly for this research, Herzfeldt found that UK home students showed a lower cultural competence than international students. This was due to their lower number of cultural experiences and to the UK's individualistic learning culture as compared to the communalism experienced by many overseas students (Waistell, 2009). This led to the first strand of the framework underpinning this research: the need to increase the cultural experiences of UK students.

The second strand of the theoretical framework is encapsulated in the work of Ippolito (2007), who asserts that 'deficit' models are often used to frame international students' assimilation into UK education, as identified also by Cadman (2000). There is much research on how overseas students can be 'enabled' to succeed academically in the HE environment, rather than acknowledging what such students can bring to the UK learning experience. In order to ensure that overseas students can achieve in the same way as home students we need to make our learning more inclusive. The theory which underpins Ippolito's work is that linking critical pedagogy with intercultural communications (Helmundt, 2003), which challenges assumptions that international students should merely adjust to with how learning is oriented in the UK. Furthermore, the cultural experiences of overseas students can be used to increase the cultural experience of their home-based peers in the classroom (Ward, 2001).

The natural corollary of the framework which is being built up is that, as well as finding ways which increase the intercultural capital of both home and overseas students and staff, in their separate ways, one needs to build intercultural training that is much more flexible than has traditionally been the case. (see Kember and Gow, 1991). This must be training which avoids stereotyping and which a range of participants can respond to. This is where the work of Welikala and Watkins (2008) is particularly relevant. The premise of their book is 'the concept of cultural script' (p.2), and the importance of taking into account the varying cultural scripts which learners have. Rather than the traditional view of the lecturer as the 'respected guru' (p.16), these authors suggest that peer interaction is important (p.48). Learning should be based on a set of interactions between participants who will all bring different cultural scripts. Welikala and Watkins suggest that these scripts are important learning resources rather than barriers and they use the discourse approach to intercultural learning espoused by Scollon and Scollon (1995).

Welikala and Watkins suggest that all participants can be helped to benefit each other to develop intercultural competence. This third strand of the theoretical framework brings the first and second strands together, as set out in the table below.

<i>Home students</i>	<i>Overseas students</i>	<i>All students</i>
<i>The effectiveness of an individual to work across cultural boundaries increases with the number of their international/intercultural experiences</i>	<i>It is important to challenge the deficit model of intercultural training where the UK approach is seen as the best</i>	<i>Building training on individual stories rather than stereotypes</i>
<i>Herzfeldt, 2007</i>	<i>Ippolito, 2007</i>	<i>Welikala and Watkins, 2008</i>
<i>Developmental learning theories</i>	<i>International communication theories</i>	<i>Discourse theories</i>

Table 1: Framework for developing Intercultural Awareness training

METHODOLOGY

Training intervention

Based on this theoretical framework, an innovative intervention was designed and run in 2007 in our Business School. The School looked for a practical way in which it could use the theoretical framework to increase the international/intercultural experience of its home students, help the international students to combine their learning approaches with UK-centric approaches, and ultimately devise an interactive intercultural awareness workshop which benefited everyone. Students could thus leave the University able to make a greater contribution to the international community as more effective international managers. At the same time School managers wanted to do this in a way which was innovative and inspiring because the framework suggested that reflective approaches were more effective. They wanted to follow Sanderson's (2009) advice: 'Be bold to take calculated risks in your teaching' (p.70).

The School linked with an organisation called Arts and Business that seeks to bring businesses together with the artistic community to their mutual benefit. Building from the original theoretical framework, Arts and Business and the MAP Consortium devised an intervention which would inspire and develop the intercultural team-working skills of the business school final year students. Similar work in other contexts is reviewed by Darse (2005).

Having used this approach with students, in 2008 the author integrated the same intervention into staff training. The assumption being that it would have similar effect in increasing intercultural competence and be more sustainable in the HEI's learning community.

The relationship between arts practice as a means of reaching out across cultures is well analysed in the literature (for example, Bailey and Desai, 2005; Thomas and Mulvey, 2008; Liddicoat, A.J. and Diaz, 2008). Wolf (2008) analyses the effectiveness of moving away from traditional teaching methods towards more student-centred and expressive methods of addressing culture in the classroom. She shows that such a method will help students to be evaluative and act in a culturally inclusive way. The reasons for such results are explained by Wesley (2007), and further analysed by Crichton and Scarino (2007), who emphasise the importance of interaction as the key principle in the practice and development of intercultural awareness (p.15). A theme of much of this literature is that greater cultural competence comes from active learning. Through the arts, people can learn more holistically, they have a great chance of interacting with different nationalities and cultures and are able to form connections with others more easily. 'Participating in the arts gives adults experiences, contexts, and tools to help them reexperience, revise and reconceptualize multicultural diversity in their lives and communities' (Wesley, p.13). Wright (2006 and 2007) follows this up by exploring how meaning can be recreated by engaging in creative activities with diverse cultures through individuals responding to an art form.

Surveys

The research for this paper was carried out via two mixed methodology on-line surveys with the participants on the programme; first before they undertook the training and then afterwards. Each survey incorporated some quantitative background data and some reflective qualitative responses to the intervention. This methodology was adapted as it was similar to that used by Herzfeldt (2007) and Ippolito (2007) (and also Rogers-Sirin and Sirin (2009), described in the literature review above).

The purpose of the surveys was to find out attitudes to the intercultural competence training sessions held as part of the Postgraduate Certificate. The surveys were web-based and consisted of two parts; Part One conducted before and Part Two after the residential during which the intercultural training took place. The respondents represented all disciplines of the University. Half were British, the others from three other European countries.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Part One: Pre-training

Eight respondents (out of a possible 12) completed the initial questionnaire prior to the training. One of the respondents chose not to answer seven open-ended questions. Four respondents described their ethnicity as White-British; three as White-Other; and one as Mixed-Other. Five respondents stated their native (first) language was English; and one each gave it as: French; Russian; and Spanish. Two respondents reported fluency in English and competence in another European language. Four respondents reported no competence in any other language and one did not answer this question. Five individuals responded affirmatively to the question as to whether they had studied or worked abroad. Two of them had student experience and one respondent reported both student and working experience. The remaining two described their international work experience.

The survey dealt with the respondents' expectations of the intercultural training part of the Postgraduate Certificate. It is worth summarising their responses in some detail:

- 'I'd hope some very specific examples - I prefer to learn from situational items, preferring to hear how another person dealt with it. I'm hoping it won't be a lot of hand waving and generalising statements.'
- 'I am hoping this training will help provide me some guidance to deal with issues as part of my teaching as home students often report difficulties to work with international students.'
- 'Not sure. I'm firmly against communalism and believe individuals should be treated as individuals. They should not be treated as part of some larger block or community, and be assumed to hold to certain ideals that other may ascribe/or push on their "group" or "community". On the other hand, it is clear that there are different cultural backgrounds, and that responses to students should take account of these differences.'
- 'To broaden my research into other cultural areas, to find new sources of materials for my teaching and research, to enrich my personal view of the Higher Education environment.'
- 'Fuller understanding of cultural differences and their effect on the learning process.'
- 'Improved understanding of and communication with people from different cultures. An ability to bridge cultural differences between students, help them feel fully included in the study group regardless of ethnic background and learn with equal effectiveness within the same environment.'
- 'An understanding of where different cultures require different teaching approaches'.

In summary, the findings of the pre-training survey show that the participants were apprehensive at the kind of intercultural training they might be going to experience. Many of them were looking for some very specific examples of situations where intercultural awareness

was important and practical suggestions on how to handle these situations. All of them hoped that there would not be a lot of “hand waving and generalising statements”.

After the training session the same eight participants completed a questionnaire giving their opinions on their experience

Part Two: Post-training

Participants were asked what they had been expecting to get out of the intercultural training. Again, it is worth quoting some responses to show the degree to which the intervention had moved them from their original position. It is noted that the language used here is highly reflective of the training which had been delivered.

- ‘Ability to bridge cultural gaps between the students, enabling them to learn with equal effectiveness.’
- ‘Some ideas as to how to avoid any cultural difficulties when teaching.’
- ‘I was expecting to improve my ability to deal with diverse groups of students (i.e. international students, EU students, diversity within UK students).’
- ‘Post-modern all cultures are equal multiculturalism that tries to force people into stereotypical cultural boxes, rather than respecting their individuality and right not be confined by the culture they grew up in.’
- ‘Improved teaching and learning skills.’
- ‘Understanding of how to work better with students of different nationalities. Is there a difference in the way they learn?’
- ‘Better ability to interact with international students and colleagues both with respect to relational outcomes and professional achievements.’

When asked what they thought was the best aspect of the intercultural training, the participants offered the following. Again, to give a flavour of the actual responses some are quoted in full.

- ‘Demonstration that culture had so many aspects, increase in confidence.’
- ‘The perception exercise forced me to consider how my background and experience moulded the way I see things.’
- Meeting others on the course.’
- ‘I think the best aspect of the training was the way we were all involved in exercises which highlighted intercultural differences within the group. I also believe that the fact that the training was held off site helped build a close community of learning.’
- ‘The fact it did not live up to what I was expecting, and instead focused on people as individuals and how one could adapt one's responses to an individual. The challenging nature of the training. The introspection it led to.’
- ‘Meeting new members of staff. New ideas on delivering high quality teaching.’
- ‘The freedom with which we could express and share our thoughts with other participants.’

The answers to the question on the worst aspect of the training varied from the physical: (‘Sitting on the floor’; ‘The human sculpture exercise took me way outside my comfort zone’) to

content-related ones ('I think some aspects of the training may not be applicable in some situations i.e. they may be easier to apply with small groups than in very large groups i.e. 200 students').

All respondents felt they learnt skills they will use in the future, and then described why:

- 'The training encouraged deep reflection on the nature of cultural diversity and its effects on learning and teaching experience.'
- 'I will always question what I think I am seeing in future'.
- 'I believe that the training will help me communicate with intercultural students and will also help me realize the variety of student needs.'
- 'I just think it made me more open to empathising with others and examining my own views.'
- 'New engaging and dynamic teaching approach.'
- 'I started thinking about questions discussed within the session.'
- 'One for all, being better able to understand how the same notion of cultural issue is perceived by people from different cultures.'

When asked in what way the training made them rethink their approach to teaching, the following replies were forthcoming.

- 'It demonstrated importance and fun of group work, divergent teaching and learning expectations (often dependant on cultural perspective). I was more determined to find out about my students and was more convinced in importance of feedback.'
- 'The training helped me think 'outside the box' and consider innovative methods of teaching.'
- 'Take note of the intercultural diversity among the group.'

Next, the survey focused on what aspects of the training respondents thought would be useful in their careers. Whilst two respondents thought there would be no useful aspects, a further two valued the newly-established peer links ('Bonds with colleagues established during the training. Increased confidence in interaction'; 'I've met new colleagues and happy to collaborate with them in the future'.) Two respondents thought their teaching was to benefit: ('Anything related to improving my teaching skills will certainly help in my future academic career'; 'Awareness of the importance of culture for teaching'). One respondent stated the useful aspect was introspection.

Two questions dealt with the possible applications of the training in the future. The first one was concerned with how the training will be used in teaching. Two respondents were not sure. Two respondents were planning to focus on visual aids. The remaining four offered following answers:

- 'Ask for and give feedback, introduce more interaction and debate.'
- 'I will consider introducing new learning and teaching styles in my future teaching.'
- 'will help me to find a way how to encourage/persuade students to work in groups'.
- 'include reflections on cultural issues when preparing materials and lectures, and when designing evaluations.'

When asked to make suggestions for the future with regards to intercultural training, the following was reported:

- 'Undertake case studies illustrating where cultural issues have caused problems in the classroom, and how these could have been avoided or overcome.'
- 'More relevant subjects, experience and dealing with problems due to cultural differences.'
- 'Don't turn it into training about race and religion Keep it about responding to individuals and their needs, and respecting them as people not stereotypes.'
- 'More practical suggestions so to give to students.'
- 'State the objectives better. Make people more aware of what they are doing and why: self-reflection is ok but takes time to be effective.'

All participants expressed surprise at the highly participative manner of the training, but many of them were pleased with the outcome. The most strongly expressed view was that they had enjoyed the involvement in the exercises (although they expressed discomfort at the physicality of the event), and that it helped build up a close shared community between the participants. (This was evidence that the participants were living the theoretical framework.) Most importantly, the training appeared to have opened up the participants' minds and outlook and they praised 'the freedom with which we could express and share our thoughts with other participants.'

CONCLUSIONS

This paper successfully brings together for the first time a research-informed model for intercultural learning for home and overseas students with sustainable proposals to embed this in the curriculum via teacher training. The findings show that participants had learnt important intercultural skills which they will be able to use in the classroom. This effectiveness was due to the design of the training which took account of the differing, complex but inclusive, learning styles identified in the theoretical framework. The nature of the training via artist practitioners appears to have encouraged reflection on the nature of cultural diversity, and participants attested to the effects that this was going to have on their learning and teaching practice. It could be suggested, as it has been by Ladson-Billings (1995), that these approaches share the features you would expect from any good teacher – active learning which seeks to maximise and respect the approaches of all learners and which encourages them to be reflective, taking responsibility of their own learning and that of their colleagues (individually and communally).

The findings clearly replicate a number of key features of effective intercultural learning identified as important in other studies referred to both in the literature review and theoretical framework. These include the discomfort which is likely to be experienced by the participants (He and Cooper, 2009) and the need to help participants over this on the basis that it leads to greater learning. They also include the ability to create a learning space where connections can be formed (Wesley, 2007), peer interactions increased and cultural experiences incremented. The openness clearly created by the training reflects the ethnographic approaches to cultural learning which Bradley (2000) advocates, which creates openness and allows participants not just to call upon the intellect but to absorb themselves in until the familiar is strange and the strange is familiar (p.248).

IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER WORK

The implications of this work are most immediate in the design of intercultural training and the framework developed could be used in a number of different pedagogic and work-based contexts. Indeed, the author has already used it to design innovative training for students and board room level managers. In both cases the same far-reaching results have been achieved.

Despite the findings clearly replicating much of the literature. There are many limitations to this study, particularly arising from the methodology. The sample was small and the surveys did not use a recognised instrument of measurable items. It would be useful to reproduce the work, this time using both a self-report tool and behaviour-based measure, for example that of Rogers-Sirin and Sirin (2009). This would make the findings more generalisable. In spite of this, the robustness of the theoretical framework and its effect on practice is clear.

As Harman (2005) said, this area is very under-developed and is in need of investment. The implications are also important for policy makers and senior university managers, whose support, as Dunne says 'in the form of budgetary resources to fund staff training, is imperative if meaningful curricular transformation is to be realised' (2009, p.33). Having seen the results, the institution has decided to continue to include the training in its Postgraduate Certificate. This is a notable commitment to embedding intercultural learning across the institution which others should follow.

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