

Research into Practice? How Can Research Make a 'Difference' in Internationalising Higher Education?

Sheila Trahar

University of Bristol



Overview

- A Short Story from Malaysia
- Internationalisation/Globalisation/
'Diversity
- A Fellow Traveller – Some Research Journeys
- Making a Difference to Practice - 'Fostering
Inclusivity'?

A Story from Malaysia -Teaching and Learning in International Higher Education

What are the issues that arise when teaching in a context that is increasingly diverse, culturally, in particular when learners are from outside the 'local' context of Malaysia?

'A Story from Malaysia'

- Language and communication barriers
- Plagiarism
- Students are passive, demanding, aggressive, complaining
- Students have different values
- They do not mix with local students
- They have unrealistic expectations
- There is a lack of familiarity with the system/terms
- They do not like groupwork
- They challenge grades and look for the easy way out

‘Internationalisation’?

‘Globalization is the context of economic and academic trends that are part of the reality of the 21st century. Internationalization includes the policies, practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions – *and even individuals* – to cope with the global academic environment...Globalization may be unalterable but internationalization involves many choices’ (Altbach & Knight, 2007; 290-291, my emphasis)

An International/Global University?

- Curricula and research informed by international agenda
- Global student experience – international student and academic community
- Opportunity to study and work abroad as well as in UK
- Language training
- Global employability

Inclusivity in Learning and Teaching?

- Who shapes the culture of learning and intellectual HE spaces and who determines the norms of discourse'? (Turner & Robson, 2008; 11)
- How are globalising processes 'mediated on the ground, in the flesh and inside the head...as these intersect with their lives and identities'? (Kenway & Fahey, 2006; 267)
- A 'third space pedagogy'? (Ryan & Viete, 2009; 305)

Inclusivity in Learning and Teaching?

- Lack of awareness of ways in which learning and teaching are culturally mediated can result in teaching approaches that are ethnocentric and thus may be exclusionary
- We are all 'core players in the process' – and therefore need to take some responsibility for ensuring inclusivity – including 'modelling' good practice
- Most students (people) need to be encouraged to move out of their 'comfort zone' and engage with others

Inclusivity in Learning and Teaching?

- Many academic staff do not know what internationalisation of the curriculum means – or think it has nothing to do with them (Leask & Bridge, 2013)

Internationalisation at Home

- Recognises that the majority of students and academics are *not* mobile
- Opportunities for intercultural learning are ‘at home’
- Seeks to encourage and enable all students and academics to benefit from culturally diverse higher education
- ‘Internationalisation of the academic Self’ (Sanderson, 2007)

'Diversity'

'Extends beyond the structural divisions of class, gender and ethnicity. It encompasses different work, life and educational experiences, different entry routes into university and different living arrangements and family commitments. Diversity also encompasses psychological and epistemological differences, including differences in students' approaches to learning, ways of knowing, and subject knowledge' (Hockings, Cooke & Bowl, 2010; 98)

'Diversity'

- Personally resistant to a 'liberal *disavowal of difference* where authors argue that the needs of all students are the same, regardless of culture' (Manathunga, 2007, p.95)
- This may lead to a failure to address challenging issues of power, identity and culture
- BUT too much emphasis on 'difference' can create unnecessary chasms

A Fellow Traveller – Beginnings of my Research

- Emerged from own practice - extensive experience of working with 'non-traditional' students
- Impact of cultural diversity in higher education was relatively neglected in UK – emphasis on experiences of British ethnic minority undergraduates
- 'Lived experiences' of impact of 'internationalisation', 'globalisation', 'cosmopolitanism' were absent from research literature

Own Pedagogical Approaches

- “I shall only ask him and not teach him and he shall share the enquiry with me”
- Knowles – principles of andragogy
- Rogers – teacher as facilitator, resource rather than expert
- Mezirow – learning as transformation
- Marton & Saljo – ‘deep’ and ‘surface’ learning – ‘active’ and ‘passive’ learning

Deconstructing Own Pedagogy

- Impracticality of 'teaching' to all cultural traditions (Biggs, 2001, 2003) BUT
- 'An understanding of culturally distinct values may promote **learning** from ways unlike one's own, and...differences **between** cultures may highlight important but previously unrecognised differences **within** cultures' (Tweed & Lehman, 2002; 90, my emphases)

Intercultural Pedagogical Conversations and 'Events'

- Personal recognition of several factors:
- 'Cultural imperialism' – if diverse educational traditions ignored
- Own awareness of 'differences'
- Own respect for diversity – was I respecting diversity by not recognising possible cultural inviolability of pedagogy?
- Danger of stereotyping – The Chinese Learner

Intercultural Pedagogical Conversations and 'Events'

- Questioning 'Socratic questioning'
- Pursuit of 'truth' facilitated but essentially an individual process
- 'Honour the hierarchy first, your vision of the truth second' (Bond, 1991; 83)
- Encouragement of questioning and discussion but after the acquisition and understanding of concepts
- Silence – and its cultural construction
- 'No value...is merely personal, pertinent to the individual alone' (Al Zeera, 2001; 60)

Perspectives on Internationalising the Curriculum – ‘International Students’

- Disappointment at lack of opportunity to get to know ‘local’ students
- Very different learning and teaching approaches – greater emphasis on autonomous learning
- Welcome academics who are familiar with different cultures
- Difficult to ‘break into’ some groups
- Value being asked to work in intercultural groups but reluctant to make the first move

Perspectives on Internationalising the Curriculum – ‘Local Students’

- Recognise rich potential for learning in ‘international environments’
- Do not view themselves as holding any responsibility for effecting intercultural communication
- Expect academic staff to facilitate intercultural communication – welcome those who do this
- Earlier opportunities to get to know one another

Perspectives on Internationalising the Curriculum - Academics

- Internationalisation elided with ‘international students’
- Some recognition of potential for rich exchanges - we all have a responsibility to effect intercultural communication
- Much goodwill – but looking for help and support
- ‘Am I being arrogant’?

The Academic Perspective

“In fact my students complain when they attend other courses that are purely handled by the British and people who don’t perhaps have international experience. And they are just using all the local terminology and examples, calling any terms which it is only people who have studied here that will know that”.

“The way you organise your class matters. If you come in and you give everybody the impression that they are all useful to each other, they are colleagues, they will gain from each other, the diversity is a plus for you, the first day I always tell them that”.

(Adnan, Nigerian)

The Academic Perspective

“And the class sat there in deadly silence and then one of them said ‘Ronnie, we wouldn’t give you any feedback because you’re a white colonial, we don’t give feedback to white colonials. And learning that I was a white colonial...because I’ve always had the stance that I’m a liberal person and all that wasn’t me, that was somebody else. But in Fiji that was me and I carried all the sins of my fathers on my shoulders. So it changed my identity enormously and I struggled with that...They see the colour of my skin, that’s the first thing they see. They see the colour of your skin and you’re British...I think it makes you much more aware of your own assumptions about education”. (Ronnie, British, Sociology/Academic Development)

The Academic Perspective

“My English which used to be judged as very very good in Austria, maybe wasn't that good here”.

“I think sometimes I'm a little bit more sensitive to what's going on in the classroom than they are. Some of them just don't care – they walk in, they walk out. When a student says 'I can't understand it' their position is 'It's your fault' whereas my default position is 'It's my fault'”.

“Oh you're just a European and you do things differently, and we do things differently here. That's European and we are English”.

(Elsa, Computer Science, Austrian)

Making a Difference - 'Fostering Inclusivity'?

- Importance of supporting students to *prepare* for discussion and activities
- Drawing on research conducted in several countries wherever possible
- Making meaning (s) of *participation* explicit
- Balancing speakers of different languages and backgrounds - fostering intercultural communication, developing 'cultural capability'
- Acknowledging how the 'teacher' is positioned in different contexts

Making a Difference - 'Fostering Inclusivity'?

- Providing regular summaries of salient points – facilitation *and* direction
- Working with own 'discomfort' to develop new learning – 'unhomeliness'

Finally...

- ‘Pedagogy for diversity’ is just good teaching?
- BUT university teachers operate in increasingly complex learning and teaching landscapes
- ‘A vision for the global academy would surely include diverse perspectives on pedagogies and institutional as well as cultural perspectives. These pedagogies...would ensure that diverse people’s lives across the life course were enhanced’ (David et al., 2010; 201)

AND...

‘We need to consider what a pluralistic, equitable, culturally responsive education really is and how it can provide pedagogical opportunities for diverse students within interactive spaces that encourage a sense of social action, agency, dignity and hope’ (Feuerverger, 2011; 361).