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Internationalisation in the Classroom

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Internationalization at the national sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education (Knight, 2003, p.2).

Introduction

Internationalisation is a dominant force in shaping higher education in the world today. The growth in internationalisation is driven by globalisation and the responsibility of higher educational institutions to prepare students to live and work in a highly inter-connected world (Leask, 2003). Cohen (1995) argues that multicultural societies require multicultural universities. Schlepper (2008), citing Brennan, suggests that a true university cannot exist without multiculturalism and refers to John Henry Newman for whom the university is the knowledge and genius gained from harnessing the talents of a diversity of people, from a diversity of geographical locations and a diversity of cultural backgrounds.

Internationalisation provides a huge challenge to institutions, lecturers and to students to approach learning in new ways. For example, Leask (2001) reports international students' dissatisfaction regarding their level of interaction with domestic students and lecturers and states how interaction across linguistic and cultural divides is an effortful process. International students' academic adjustment difficulties can be exacerbated by many variables including language competency, difficulties with unfamiliar pedagogical styles, expectations for learning and curricular content, which does not recognise their cultural worldviews. This project aims to be a guide for lecturers to support educational integration and help create a classroom environment which values the diverse learning preferences and previous experiences of international students.

Literature Review

Policy

Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) do not exist in a vacuum. This project is cognisant of, complementary to and not in conflict with the policy frameworks regulating DIT's engagement in internationalisation. DIT's institutional policy is informed by a draft report from one of the Technological University for Dublin Working Groups, (TU4D Working Group, 2016). This TU4D report sets out key objectives for internationalisation in seven key areas, including curriculum and staff development.

National policy emphasises the need for Irish HEIs to prioritise internationalisation and this is a key component of the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 'Hunt Report', (Higher Education Strategy Group, 2011). The Hunt Report (2011) requests a distinct mission for Technological Universities that is based on career focussed education and closely aligned to labour market needs. The report sees internationalisation as crucial in this regard, observing that today's labour market expects inter-culturally competent students who can work effectively in a diverse labour market.

In October 2016, the Minister for Education launched a new International Strategy on Education, *Irish Educated, Globally Connected: An International Education Strategy for Ireland, 2016-2020*, (Government of Ireland, 2016a). The Strategy aims to deliver 37,000 additional International Higher Education and English Language Training students. The plan aims to increase the value of International Education Sector by 33% to €2.1 billion by 2020 (Government of Ireland, 2016b). Funding under this strategy will be directed at promotional and marketing campaigns in key target markets, such as the US, China, India, Brazil, Malaysia Canada, South Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Nigeria and the Gulf Region (Government of Ireland, 2016a and 2016b). As a result, citizens of these countries are likely to form the main component of international students in Irish HEIs.

Learning

International students' diverse cultural backgrounds, experiences, and learning preferences may not be met by the traditional pedagogy of uniform instruction (Vita, 2001). A mismatch between the instructors' teaching style and the students' learning preferences may explain why lecturers often fail to engage all students when the composition of the cohort is multicultural. By being aware of students' learning preferences and diverse experiences a lecturer may be able to plan their class better so as to create an inclusive environment where all students have a chance to flourish. Vita (2001) reported that international students show a much wider measure of dispersion in learning compared to those of home students. 75% of international students displayed a preference for visual rather than verbal inputs, while home students appeared to cope better with verbal information.

There is a body of literature on learning style theory, Kolb (1976), Honey and Mumford (1992), Canfield (1992), Felder and Silverman (1988) and Gardner (2006), however, little attention has been devoted to the investigation of cultural influences on the development of individual learning preferences and strategies and how educators can use this information to diversify the way they teach in order to engage all students in a multicultural setting (Vita, 2001). Lecturers can influence strategies and preferences by exposing students to different tasks, learning contexts, resources and experiences, and keeping in mind that an optimal learning environment reflects students' "cultures, experiences, and perspectives" (Banks & Banks, 2005, p.243). Good practice would be to include the use of supplementary visual diagrams in visualisation software such as www.coggle.it to contextualise the organisation of new information and help clarify complex terms (Coggle, n.d.).

Internationalisation in the classroom, demands a move from a teacher-centred learning environment, in which the traditional lecture and discussion style of teaching dominates to a more inclusive, student-centred, interactive, and experiential learning environment (Bond, 2003). Such an environment values the diverse learning preferences and previous experiences of international students (Guo & Jamal, 2007).

Teaching Methods

The adaptation of teaching methods for culturally mixed groups should (a) address additional barriers to learning for international students as they accustom to new learning environments, (b) value cultural diversity and intercultural perspectives, and (c) encourage inclusive and supportive engagement among the cohort (Arkoudis *et al*, 2013).

Where English has not been their primary language for learning, the additional cognitive activity for international students can be supported by providing induction, presentations, notes or other explanatory resources to aid accessibility and comprehension in advance of lectures, laboratories, seminars, and tutorials (Carroll & Ryan, 2005). The materials can be re-structured with a hierarchical focus on the key issues, orientating outlines, contextualised concept maps and links between topics presented in different learning venues or virtual environments. Detailed notes can explain foundational materials, abstract concepts and jargon, while podcasts or videos can aid students to review their note-taking. Teachers should recognise that language abilities may influence reading, understanding, interpretation or evaluation of written and oral materials and that some students may require extra time to process answers.

An assortment of learning modes/activities, including individual and small-group work, or home study, can support a wider range of learning experiences, preferences and strategies. By including examples from a variety of cultures and by valuing diversity without stereotyping, it can become normal for students to learn about a global set of experiences, skills and expert resources (Ayre & Nafalski, 2000). Short explanatory videos from abroad e.g. MegaNet (2015) can illustrate the ways in which topics are considered, organised or valued in other cultures.

Class participation can be balanced with the rotation of functions within diverse groups. The support of individuals within sensitively selected and mixed groups can reduce cultural misunderstandings and disruptive anxieties between students from different educational backgrounds (Ryan & Viète, 2009). Integration can also be exemplified by facilitating engagement with international members of the faculty and visiting academics.

Technology

Integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) teaching tools into a lecturer's portfolio can facilitate international students, especially where visual inputs are preferred to verbal inputs (Vita, 2001). A UK Higher Education Academy report outlines how technology-enhanced-learning (e-learning) enables students to choose their preferred learning platform (Gordon, 2014) and that such flexibility is a pragmatic solution to addressing the myriad of learning preferences that are characteristic of internationalised groups.

Flexible learning enables students to choose aspects of their study, in terms of pace, place and mode (Gordon, 2014). Blended learning is of particular relevance to internationalised classrooms where face-to-face instruction is combined with technology-mediated instruction (Graham & Dziuban, 2008). Teachers can engage 'enhancing blends' to incrementally change their pedagogical instruction to include the provision of supplemental online resources and the integration of minor online activities into learning exercises.

Flipped classrooms invert the traditional face-to-face teaching mode (Seery, 2014). Lecturers post their lecture content online and students digest the content prior to arrival in class. The benefits of this delivery method are innumerable, particularly for international students. They have the time and space to engage with new vocabulary and concepts, exploring visual and verbal content in advance of their class (University of Oxford, 2015).

The majority of today's third level educators fall outside the millennial age profile of everyday technology users (persons born between 1982 and 2002) and may resist integrating ICT into their classroom. By doing so, they run the risk of alienating their diverse student group. Millennials are more disposed to engaging with technology-enhanced learning (Gordon, 2014). By integrating technologies as part of learning processes, teachers can facilitate the four c's of learning, communication, creativity, collaboration and critical thinking (Dale, 2014).

Assessment

Assessment is a key area in which international students need to be given guidance (Arkoudis, 2006). International students often hold different academic assumptions, expectations and requirements to students with domestic educational backgrounds (Carroll, 2008). It is important that lecturers are clear in highlighting what is valued in the assessment process and to consider providing explicit instructions on the length and format of assignment submissions, what the assessment criteria mean and how they are applied (Carroll, 2008). In an exam scenario, it is also desirable to outline the specific requirements and to provide contextualised examples of the required types of responses.

In catering for different learning experiences of international students, it is advisable to vary the types of assessment tasks deployed throughout a module. Early scheduling of an assessment in a semester can help identify students who would benefit from English language writing support.

While constructive feedback is important for all students, it is particularly relevant to international students who can face the additional challenges of adapting to new learning environments. Feedback should consider their unfamiliarity with aspects of how the institute is organised and operates. Face-to-face engagement should take account of, and respond to, issues that arise as students develop awareness of requirements in an Irish academic context.

Plagiarism is often a cultural issue. It is less an issue of students copying materials but instead, whether work submitted as 'their own' actually displays the student's own learning (Carroll, 2007). Many international students are unfamiliar with Irish academic standards and enter DIT without a clear definition of plagiarism or its consequences. Lecturers could rethink their induction sessions to include this topic. Ongoing support from library colleagues and other lecturers can support the progress of an international student's induction into Irish academic culture. McGowan (2008, p. 92) suggests that international students should be regarded as "apprentice researchers" who require specific guidance in developing appropriate academic referencing and writing skills so they can construct their own understanding rather than remember and reproduce that of others.

Conclusion

Multicultural societies require multicultural universities and internationalisation is a powerful influence within higher education. As DIT prepares for the establishment of the TU4D, internationalisation and staff development has become increasingly important. Informed by government policy, including the "Hunt Report", the international education sector in Ireland is set to expand to €2.1 billion by 2020.

This project has sought to highlight an evolving policy context, benefits, opportunities, research insights and some practical approaches for lecturers who are tasked with supporting the needs of both international and domestic students within increasingly multicultural classrooms.

Evolving conceptual understandings of internationalisation and expectations for student competence prompted consideration of the policy context, to help prepare our international and domestic students for a globalised workplace. Given that the diversity of learning preferences in multicultural groups is broader, literature on learning theory was examined to aid appropriate preparation and delivery of subject materials. With student-centred approaches to learning reported as being better aligned to such diversity, teaching methods to engage international students alongside their domestic counterparts were explored. Sensitive mixing of cultures in group activities and the use of intercultural examples and perspectives underpins recommendations for inclusiveness within multicultural groups.

Technologies were examined for blended teaching modes to engage both international and domestic students. While student-selection of the pace, venue and activity facilitate broader engagement, benefits accrue to non-native language learners who revisit materials to assure their knowledge attainment. Finally, strategies for assessment and guidance were reviewed for international students who have to adapt to new learning environments, develop their own understanding of topics and avoid plagiarism.

This project provides information for educationalists who are seeking to integrate the needs of international and domestic students in an increasingly multicultural learning environment.

Internationalisation in the Classroom

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- Internationalisation is impacting on DIT and changing the institutional dynamic. Currently one in twenty students in DIT classrooms is an international student, but that number is set to expand significantly.
- With a national strategy to grow the international education sector by 33% by 2020, are lecturers adequately prepared to maximise the emerging opportunities for personal, cultural and academic development?
- As our institution works towards technological university status, a strong emphasis is being placed on career-focussed education that is closely aligned to international labour market needs and mobility.
- The policy impetus towards internationalisation at national and institutional level requires new and flexible approaches to pedagogy in the classroom.



- Learning preferences and strategies are typically more diverse in culturally mixed student groups and international students prefer information presented visually. Why not try www.VisualsSpeak.com and their ImageSet facilitation tool to help prepare some of the visual aspects of your lectures?
- A student-centred approach to learning should supersede the more traditional pedagogy of teacher led discussion. Thematic crossword exercises from www.EclipseCrossword.com can stimulate revision.
- A multi-style approach to learning would help satisfy the needs of international students, by exposing them to various learning contexts, resources and experiences. Hands-on activities can reinforce lectures.
- Good practice could include the use of supplementary visual diagrams in www.coggle.it to contextualise the organisation of new information and help to clarify complex terms.



- Where English has not been their primary language of learning, international students can benefit from teaching styles that exemplify concepts. Illustrations with supplemental written explanations can aid understanding of abstract concepts, while also clarifying the descriptive language – useful for all students.
- Teaching discussions should value cultural diversity and occasionally incorporate intercultural examples or perspectives. Short explanatory videos produced abroad can demonstrate how topics are considered, organised or valued in other cultures. See this MIT production example: <http://bit.do/gravitationalwaves>
- Inclusivity of international students can be encouraged in class cohorts by sensitive pairing of students for learning activities that also reduce cultural segregation. Properly supported, such roleplay can enrich the learning experience with more diverse perspectives, personal development and communications skills.



- Devices or software can support a variety of multi-sensory activities to engage the more diverse ranges of learning preferences and experiences that are typically of internationalised groups. Used creatively, technology can also integrate the development of communications, creativity, collaboration and critical thinking skills in learning or assessment processes; and help to reduce the gaps in learning within groups.
- DIT's Webcourses can host additional materials for international students who are preparing for less familiar learning environments. This reserves more time in class for hands-on activities and to establish rapport among classmates. Online materials obviously enable access for reflection by all students.
- ICT also enables blended teaching modes and student selection of the pace, venue and activity to better support knowledge attainment, in particular among non-native language learners. While the flexibility can suit all students, international students are offered a wider range of learning style experiences.



- Misunderstandings, due to different cultural customs or practices, can be minimised by providing explicit instructions on assignments or exams and criteria for their assessment. For example, the assessment brief should indicate clearly which aspects are compulsory and which are for guidance or suggestions.
- Students transitioning to Irish academic approaches can be discouraged from plagiarism by providing them with examples of best practice. This can be complemented by requesting that all students provide evidence of their individual academic activity and reflection.
- Constructive feedback for international students should summarise and express support by focusing on the action items and communicating confidence in the student's ability in order to facilitate their ongoing familiarisation with a new learning environment.



Online Presentation

<http://bit.do/prezi-internationalisation>



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