Original citation:
Hampton, Cathy and Demeure-Ahearne, Ariane (2016) From widening horizons to widening participation : transmitting the experience of global citizenship to the school classroom. In: Speicher, Oranna and Goria, Cecilia and Stollhans, Sascha, (eds.) Innovative language teaching and learning at university: enhancing participation and collaboration. Research-publishing.net, pp. 95-104

Permanent WRAP URL:
http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/87729

A note on versions:
The version presented in WRAP is the published version, or, version of record, and may be cited as it appears here.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk

warwick.ac.uk/lib-publications

12 From widening horizons to widening participation: transmitting the experience of global citizenship to the school classroom

Cathy Hampton[1] and Ariane Demeure-Ahearne[2]

Abstract

This paper gives account of a project involving Year Abroad students of French at Warwick University challenged to select *realia* from their host countries in order to stimulate enthusiasm for language learning in local schools. It considers the cognitive and affective processes informing the 'culture gathering' that took place: how did the responsibility to act as the interface between a foreign culture and their own inform these students' own intercultural and linguistic journeys? Assessing outcomes, the paper goes on to describe the implementation of a more ambitious second stage project involving the Routes into Languages Adopt a Class scheme, Warwick PGCE MFL students and staff, and students on the British Council assistantship and Erasmus programmes.

Keywords: year abroad, global citizenship, intercultural, linguistic, university.

1. Introduction

There is something of a paradox in the current situation in Modern Foreign Language (MFL) education in the UK: whilst students in higher education institutions are being encouraged to participate in study abroad initiatives

and exchange programmes in order to increase their exposure to a 'global' environment, and to develop 'intercultural' skills highly prized by employers, pupils in UK schools are voting with their feet away from the study of language.

Currently, initiatives to alter the direction of travel, such as compulsory language teaching in primary schools, and the introduction of the English baccalaureate in the secondary sector, have had mixed results. 29% of state secondary schools have seen a reduction in the numbers of hours available for language teaching in the curriculum, and the transition between primary and secondary language learning is far from smooth, limiting the impact of the KS2 initiative (Board & Tinsley, 2015). This disengagement with language surely reduces the impact of other cross-cultural education within the UK classroom. If transcultural competence is intended to enable learners to "reflect on the world and themselves through the lens of another language and culture" (MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, 2007, para 9), experiencing linguistic difference is paramount, and forces greater engagement with global epistemologies that are challenging traditional national and cultural boundaries. At this febrile moment in the history of education, described by Barnett (2007) as an 'age of uncertainty', new pedagogies are required to form "future citizens of a multicultural society and open economy in a globalised world" (Priestland et al., 2013, para 6).

2.   Engaging the Year Abroad language student as transcultural specialist

This paper describes a practical response to some of these questions that uses the uncertainty of the open space and travel afforded by the Year Abroad as a springboard to cognitive engagement with the language-culture binary in both the school and the university classroom. In a pilot project running from 2013-15, 15 volunteer students about to undertake their intercalated study Year Abroad (13 to France; 2 to Canada) embraced the challenge to seek out *realia* and other artifacts that could be used to bring the contemporary experience

of living and working in a French or francophone country directly into the language classroom. The students visited three local schools before departure to gain a sense of current trends in MFL school teaching, and received training on the national curriculum from a MFL PGCE academic. During the Year Abroad, the group used a variety of social media to share and debate their discoveries. On their return, they formed teams around key topics (travel and transport, protest in France, the *bande dessinée*, food and regionalism, local history and tourism, and Québec) and began creating learning activities with their resources, advised by two MFL secondary teachers.

3.   An overview of pedagogical aims and outcomes

In line with Helle, Tynjälä, and Olkinuora's (2006) values of project-based learning, the task of identifying cultural and linguistic artifacts was intended pedagogically to be the "problem […] serv[ing] to drive learning activities" with "learner control of the learning process" at its centre (pp. 290-292). In this way, the project aimed to make connections between the process of resource gathering, the building of core skills (collaboration, communication, time management), and deep reflection on the labile relationship between language, culture and self. This triangulation worked effectively whilst the students were in their host countries, as they reflected in interviews on their return. Jack, the project leader, summed up:

> "the challenges working with a project that has people so distributed in so many different places, from Canada to different regions in France. Trying to liaise with all those people at the same time and bring deadlines together was quite a useful experience and set of skills to bring into a kind of professional life".

An enriched perception of global identity clearly emerged as the students weighed up the learning potential of the different cultural objects they had chosen. Taking as an example the group's engagement with the *bande dessinée*,

online discussions reveal that initially the object itself required some cultural decoding by the students:

> "One idea I was thinking about for this project was the French hardback comic books which seem to be quite popular in France. BD or bande dessinée are the latest craze in my town amongst younger teenagers".

There followed processes of:

- personal identification with the object:

  > "turns out loads of people our age read them too";

- cross-cultural discussion:

  > "when I asked [the children of the family I live with] about this project and their ideas, BD was the resource they thought would work best with people their age in England";

- and engagement with regional practices:

  > "the 41st International Festival of Bande Dessinée is taking place in Angoulême next weekend";

  > "I'll try to find some Quebecois equivalents too[3]".

4. Project ontologies: an overview of key values and aspirations

The students' remit within the scope of the project was to assess the object's characteristics and its possible applications for younger learners, and this

3. Quotations taken from forum discussions.

responsibility added complexity to their consideration of its plural functions. Below, Jack discusses this kind of cognitive awakening:

"[You] understand that in some regions there are different languages, different words, different cultural practices: things I hadn't really thought about. You can have so many differences within one country and within one […] culture, it kind of made you aware of just how many cultural differences there could be within a continent. […] It makes you appreciate the sheer scale of it".

Representing the authentic origins of an object became an important component of the project, as Ben noted:

"A lot of the stuff I picked up I would have picked up anyway: it was kind of maps and guides and tickets that I picked up by virtue of living in Paris […] so it was kind of the practical day to day life: it wasn't really a conscious effort all the time, and in some ways I feel that made it a little bit more authentic, because it's a genuine lived experience".

Molly-May, a language assistant, arrived at her lycée to discover pupils on strike as a result of the 'affaire Léonarda' (the controversial expulsion of a Roma girl, removed very publicly from her school by French immigration authorities in October 2013). She simply asked her students to note down their response to the incident (did they all strike? why (not)?), and returned to the UK with an object in the form of a series of testimonies.

Julia joined a French student activist group that offered support, both educational and pastoral, to prisoners. Her learning object was taken from *L'Envolée*, the group's magazine, and was personalised through her experience of visiting in a Parisian prison.

Fi and Gwen, both in Canada, sought to convey the physical effects of their new landscape and its exotic properties: the cold; the different flora and fauna (see Figure 1).

The personal investment in students' chosen learning objects was in no doubt. Furthermore, it was clear that they had begun to "rethink […] the relationship of 'language' with 'culture' in quite a marked way" (Freadman, 2014, p. 373). Some key values emerged:

- In a digital world, the value to pupils of physical contact with *realia* was paramount: students created hardcopy school resource packs to address this need[4].

- The story behind the *realia* chosen was itself important and could act as a 'hook' to engage pupils: students included a personal fact file in each pack telling their story (see Figure 2 for an example).

- Serendipity was crucial: stimulating materials were discovered in unexpected places. Any future project should continue to embrace the student as producer ethos.

Figure 1.   Fi's and Gwen's learning object

Valcartier et des activités d'hiver
- http://www.valcartier.com/glissades-d-hiver/fr/
- Regardez ce site, est ce que nous avons quelque chose comme ça en Grande Bretagne?

Une patinoire extérieure dans la ville de Québec

En février j'ai campée dans un tepee. On avait un feu de bois et des guimauves à cuire sur le feu.

---

4. The resource packs contained accessible realia such as tickets, brochures and maps, together with accompanying worksheets devised by the students (involving, at KS3: role play, matching words to pictures, plotting journeys on maps; and KS4: decoding cursive handwriting; identifying and correcting errors in native speaker French; researching and creating protest slogans; analysing the ethics of the prison system).

Figure 2. Fact file by Ben, one of the Warwick students

(Year abroad spent interning at HEC Paris.)

My name is Ben and I am a final year student studying French & History at the University of Warwick.

The relevance of this project for me came about, as even having studied French from the beginning of secondary school, I got off the Eurostar at *Gare du nord* to begin my year abroad, and had absolutely no idea where to go, what to do, what ticket to buy or any of the like to get from one side of Paris to the other. After a conversation with an SNCF representative, and a fight with the touch screen ticket machine, I had my ticket and was on my way, only to find that the ticket was in fact the wrong one, leading to a confrontation between myself, several large suitcases, and a turnstile barrier before having to purchase a second ticket to get me to where I needed to be.

This situation could easily have been avoided, and the first few weeks in Paris been made much more fluid with a little more preparation, which is why I propose the orientation exercises above

5. Taking the project forward

Discussion with Routes into Languages in July 2015 revealed some common ground between this pilot project and their Adopt a Class scheme[5]. Following consultation with the regional Adopt a Class co-ordinator based at Aston University, the next iteration of the project has incorporated features of this scheme within a particular Warwick framework, as set out below:

1. The Warwick Centre for Professional Education (CPE) (which provides PGCE training) has been engaged as a new stakeholder in the project. MFL teacher trainers at the CPE have worked with the French project leaders to identify a network of local partnership schools, both primary and secondary.

2. Nineteen participating schools, both primary and secondary, have been engaged and paired with Year Abroad students for the 2015-16 academic year.

---

5. See https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/london/activity/2260 for more details.

3. The project now has three distinct strands:

- **The Year Abroad blog** (electronic communication between school and student via email, Powerpoint, blogs and videos).

- **The Virtual School exchange** (student ambassadors undertaking a Foreign Language Assistant role to facilitate pupil-pupil/teacher-teacher communication between French and UK schools).

- **Authentic Teaching Resources** (the collection of *realia* and development of learning activities in close collaboration with the partner school).

4. Teacher and student handbooks have been created, incorporating:

- A project agreement form tying school and student to mutually-agreed deadlines and targets.

- Template letters in French for language assistants to present to the headteachers in their overseas schools (explaining its goals and addressing issues of safeguarding).

- Sample learning activities.

5. A Moodle learning platform has been created for the exchange of resources and ideas, with dedicated areas for teacher-teacher and teacher-student dialogue, topic-based forums and video storage.

6. In consultation with the CPE, the project aims to engage MFL PGCE students within partner UK schools in resource development and analysis.

7. A project conference involving all UK stakeholders will take place in October 2016.

6.   Provisional conclusions

The positive response of local schools and students to this second iteration of the project suggests the time is ripe to think about the ethics of global student exchange in more creative ways and to broaden its impact (Kehm, 2014). There is evidence to suggest that understanding of global identity grows in exchanges between mobile and non-mobile citizens:

> "The development of a global identity does not even require international study on behalf of every individual. [The University of] Malmö proposes the idea of an 'internationalisation at home', where simply by virtue of internationals visiting a foreign institution, domestic students can develop a similar identity without crossing any international borders" (Lang, 2015, p. 9)[6].

This project hopes to facilitate such encounters:

> "pupils of all backgrounds [...] will benefit from a direct connection with native speakers of the same age and the opportunity to see themselves through the eyes of another culture, thus expanding their experience as global citizens, irrespective of family background[7]".

These micro-encounters between school and university, and between home and host cultures offer innumerable possibilities for breaking down long-established boundaries. The project's personalised approach to the championing of intercultural, linguistic and social engagement will, it is hoped, provide case studies that stimulate new avenues of enquiry into affective and cognitive responses to the idea of national and international citizenship made possible by virtual and real exchanges.

---

6. Ben Lang is the student quoted earlier in the paper. His participation in the project contributed to his desire to research global student identity in further detail during his final year, see also Streitwieser (2014).

7. Georgina Newton, Senior Teaching Fellow, Warwick Centre for Professional Education; Widening Participation Development Fund application submitted Friday 3rd July 2015.

7.   Acknowledgements

References

Barnett, R. (2007). *A will to learn: being a student in an age of uncertainty.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Board, K., & Tinsley, T. (2015). *Language trends 2014/15: the state of language learning in primary and secondary schools in England.* British Council and CfBT Trust.

Freadman, A. (2014). Fragmented memory in a global age: the place of storytelling in modern language curricula. *The Modern Language Journal, 98*(1)*,* 373-385. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2014.12067.x

Helle, L., Tynjälä, P., & Olkinuora, E. (2006). Project-based learning in post-secondary education – theory, practice and rubber sling shots. *Higher Education, 51*(2), 287-314.

Kehm, B. M. (2014). Beyond neo-liberalism: higher education in Europe and the global public good. In P. Gibbs & R. Barnett (Eds.), *Thinking about higher education* (pp. 91-108). NY: Springer.

Lang, B. (2015). *International student migration and the globalisation of higher education: towards the creation of a global identity?* Undergraduate dissertation, University of Warwick.

Modern Language Association Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages. (2007). *Foreign languages and higher education: new structures for a changed world*. Retrieved from https://www.mla.org/Resources/Research/Surveys-Reports-and-Other-Documents/Teaching-Enrollments-and-Programs/Foreign-Languages-and-Higher-Education-New-Structures-for-a-Changed-World

Priestland, D., Reynolds, M., Wentworth, R., Parker, M., Baker, Y., Hamnett, C., & Byrne, N. (2013, February 12). Michael Gove's new curriculum: what the experts say. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/feb/12/round-table-draft-national-curriculum

Streitwieser, B. (Ed.) (2014). *Internationalisation of higher education and global mobility*. Oxford: Symposium Books.

Innovative language teaching and learning at university: enhancing participation and collaboration
Edited by Cecilia Goria, Oranna Speicher, Sascha Stollhans