Integral student guidance in internationalisation with PAL

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ABSTRACT: Integral student guidance in internationalisation, PAL

I INTRODUCTION

The Integral Student Support in Internationalisation project (ISBI) is funded by the K.U.Leuven Association (2010-2012). Active partners are members of the academic internationalization staff, lecturers and coordinators of 9 higher education institutions of the K.U.Leuven Association.
The ISBI vision is to develop an INTEGRAL system to support incoming and outgoing students before, during and after their experience abroad, involve those students in internationalisation@home and thus allow all students to obtain international-intercultural competencies. Included is intensive use of PAL and buddy techniques.
This approach is a form of active learning support: the aim of internationalisation and internationalisation@home is lifelong learning and multicultural competence development. A mobility can imply new insights in the discipline, new skills, another way to see themselves. But this is not evident. ISBI wants to focus the international experience more on conscious competence development, also in internationalisation@home. One example of an active learning tool is PAL.

Statement:
International competence development is important, but not evident, even in international mobility. The Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve declaration aims at 20% mobile students for 2020. The other 80% students also have to develop these competences via “internationalisation@home” experiences.

Objectives, research questions:
- How to optimize the support of students in an international context.
- How to develop and strengthen international and intercultural competencies for these students.
- How to develop competence-based learning in internationalization, combined with Peer Assisted Learning-techniques (PAL). Being a tutor (or buddy) is a unique learning opportunity, not only for international competencies but also to develop social competences, coaching, cognitive competences, etc…
- How to adapt PAL to internationalisation.
- How to involve mobility students in internationalisation@home.

Results for the target groups:
The project has 5 target groups: mobility students, students@home, tutors and their international coordinators. A fifth target group on the macro level are the policy makers of the K.U.Leuven Association and other higher education institutions to whom we will formulate policy recommendations as a result of this project.

At the moment the project includes 30 pilots. This will result in 30 good practices in internationalisation.

The final project result will be a GPS-guide(Global Position of the Student in the internationalisation learning environment) in which the project summarizes the findings for each target student group. This guide will help students to better find their way in internationalization and to maximize their competencies gained out of the international experience (at home or during a mobility).
Practical instruments such as train-the-trainers, road maps for implementation, exemplifying brochures, will be centralised as side results for academic staff and lecturers, whom we consider a target group on the medium level.

II Trajectory and pilots

The project is based on action research: an idea is tried out in a pilot (sub)project in one or several institutions.

Vision:
Guidance in internationalisation stands for “to guide the students with their international experience in a route (orientation, information, preparation, guidance during and upon return) to maximise competences acquired from the experience”.

A lot of new ideas are tried out, the results are reported in “good practices” and the lessons and experiences are globalised in a GPS-guide for the students and didactical files for the lecturers and coordinators. Often PAL-techniques come in as flexible guidance instruments.

The most important pilots are classified in the reference table (table 1) below, a lot of pilots run in more than one partner institution:

Table 1: pilot projects of ISBI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trajectory /Student group</th>
<th>Incoming students</th>
<th>Outgoing students</th>
<th>I@home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sensitisation event</td>
<td>Sensitisation event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Testimonies</td>
<td>International weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Buddy system</td>
<td>Facebook for IPs</td>
<td>Buddy system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>WIKI in GPS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support during exchange</td>
<td>Buddy system</td>
<td>Intercultural guidance from the home base</td>
<td>In class PAL</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Smartphone application</td>
<td></td>
<td>PAL in placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td></td>
<td>Buddy system/Tandem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PAL in placement</td>
<td></td>
<td>PAL language support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In class PAL/Tandem</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Guidance upon return</td>
<td>Scenario for “reversed culture shock”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>support</td>
<td>Return event with reflections – WIKI in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>GPS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluation criteria for a pilot project:
Qualitative: A pilot project gives added value to the development of the route counselling for students. The instruments developed through the pilot project can be used in other partner institutions. Each pilot is evaluated to learn and improve (Plan – Do – Check – Act).
Quantitative: Even a pilot project with only 2 students involved can be taken into account if there is a learning outcome (for the project). A good example is a tandem-PAL variant in a placement with one Belgian and one incoming student.
Results
The main project result will be a GPS-guide (Global Position of the Student in the internationalisation learning environment) in which the project summarizes the findings for each target student group. This guide will help students to better find their way in internationalization and to maximize their competencies gained out of the international experience (at home or during a mobility). This e-tool has the same structure as the scheme of the pilots (table 1). It is tried out in three pilots, one also in KHKempen. Didactical files focus on the staff.
This GPS is useful for orientation (experiences of students stimulate to attempt an Erasmus mobility), contains an information part, useful for preparation. Filling in the results of a mobility is a first step in the reflection process.
However, the integral approach of the complete project itself is a methodological result: there are a lot of win-win possibilities in this approach.
Only to give an idea of this possibilities take a look at the GPS-pilot. It consist of an information part with the essential information for the student in each part of his trajectory. This information package is composed as a synthesis of the information already given in all partner institutions, reviewed by all partners and tried out by three partners. All basic information is brought together in a client driven way, other information is included by links. Every student in twelve institutions (larger than the project) has access to it. A second level is institution or course specific. In addition a wiki parts is included for the outgoing students. The experiences abroad are brought in by all students, so the next generation outgoing students can make a better choice of an institution and starts from the experience of the other student. On the other hand is filling in this tool a form of reflection and return guidance.
A smart phone application (with wiki possibilities) is included for the incoming student, also directing those students to internationalisation@home.

III PAL in internationalisation
PAL in internationalisation seems more difficult than classical PAL. Practice shows that the global approach of PAL in internationalisation is different from classical PAL variants.
Focus in the ISBI project is on:
- Reciprocal PAL (in class) (See De Smet, 2008)
- Buddy variants, directed versus internationalisation;
- Tandem variants, for example in placements;
- E-Pal in internationalisation (guidance from the home base);
- Language peer instruction.

Pal starts with the objectives. In internationalisation the multicultural competence of tutors and tutees development is central. Pal is an excellent way to engage students in internationalisation@home. However, it is more important in internationalisation to clarify the objectives and the tutor role to tutors and to incoming students. For example, a survey demonstrated mobility students felt underestimated when home students were asked to take the tutor role and clarify content and context to the international students and help them with e.g. exercises. This was not the objective in the pilot, but the tutors played that role.
So much more attention is needed in tutor trainings and presentations to the mobility students on the restricted role of tutors. In some contexts (e.g. in class PAL and PAL in placement) it is even better to simply choose for reciprocal PAL. In this case the PAL-training is given in English to both groups (home students and mobility students) at the same time. The tutor role in reciprocal PAL is taken by turns. (See also Van Roosmalen e.a.2010).
Also buddies get training focussing on their role towards the mobility students and the added value they can get from the program for themselves. Here intercultural competences and helping mobility students to integrate in the local academic student world and beyond (with practical tips) are the main issues. Without buddy programs mobility students often form separate groups, a missed chance for internationalisation@home. On the other hand, also buddy programs are successful in the competence development of tutors. In general international tutors and buddies develop more competences than tutees and often more than “classical” tutors.

PAL in internationalisation starts with a tutor training, adapted to the international content:
- International PAL, what and why? (included objectives and advantages for tutor and tutees)
- International-intercultural competences
- International PAL how?
  o Preparation (practical, content, pedagogical)
  o Starting a contact or session
  o A Pal contact or session: interaction, questions and responses, discussion…
- The tutor role and communication
  o Open, safe and respectful environment (very important in internationalisation)
  o Listen actively
  o Reflection and feedback (negative and positive)
- Tutor role in international competence learning (intercultural learning)
- Ending a session or a contact
- Self evaluation or reflection

IV Some results from pilots
We focus in on some pilots in order to make the whole project more concrete.
Smart phone application
First look at the development of a smart phone application (Engineering Department), part of the GPS-tool. Objective: to inform incoming students on the campus and the environment. The project started with an needs enquiry and the development is finished. At the moment the application itself is ready, the content is now filled in and (automatically) combined with Google maps. No user results are available yet. A screen shot is included.

![Figure 2: Screen shot smart phone application](image)

The students can post comments, making this tool interactive. Also included in this application is the registration of the experiences of students abroad in a wiki, available for all outgoing students.
**Return guidance**

Another pilot was return guidance. Return guidance is necessary, even if not all students want initiatives in this direction. Serious problems can occur when the students return from **third world countries**. Take a look at some results of an enquiry on this in a big institution, n= 74, about 50% response. We also have the analogue results of a smaller institution, however slightly different. Would a return day be meaningfully for you? (n = 74)

![Figure 3: Is a return day meaningfully](image)

This means that about 25 students need a return day, the others don’t. However, this doesn’t mean they don’t want any return guidance, other forms can be better for them. Very important seems the possibility to have a lot of contacts with other mobility students. If the students see a lot of other students with the same or analogue experience, the results are different.

The need of return guidance and the obstacles to tackle with this guidance follows from the results of the more qualitative analysis that follows (fig. 4).

This analyses proves that for some students the reverse culture shock seems to appear. Most students give evidence some changes are occurred, most of them positive, as they developed competences. But at the same time other problems occur and this proves the need of return guidance. The results also give hints to organise this guidance better.
In a scale from “don’t agree at whole” to “I agree completely”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience changed me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems occur at home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coming home is boring, black hole</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am no longer someone special</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity conflict with themselves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am in a transition period to new identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties to share experiences with family and friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in my stories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am changed, others have problems to deal with that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New competences don’t seem relevant now</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned not to be able to maintain my new skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More social engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other look on Belgium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly contact with people from mobility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other insights in my discipline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I question my study or profession choice</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4: Analysis returning students**

In class PAL

A look at the PAL-results in a pilot in an Erasmus IP-program seems disappointing: Every tutor was candidate to do this again, but only 25% of the tutees found an additional value:
The number of tutors and tutees was small, so statistically this was not relevant. However, qualitative techniques gave a good insight. The tutors and the tutees misunderstood the tutor role in internationalisation: both groups thought they had to focus on the content of the course. And some of the incoming students were stronger than some of the tutors... So we can conclude:

- The tutors developed their multicultural competences; a very positive result;
- There were intensive contacts between incoming students and students@home; a first step in international-intercultural competence development for both parties;
- Things went wrong at the multicultural competence level: the tutor gave the impression to be more competent than the incoming guest, this was appreciated as patronizing. The mobility students thought they were considered less intelligent, whenever a tutor proposed to help them.
- Also in the set up of the project pilot errors were made: the tutor training was not sufficiently focussed on internationalisation context and too much focussed on “how to tutor”, first major cause of the problem, and in the project information the restricted tutor role was not well enough defined and explained to tutors and tutees.

So the next time this pilot runs, we used the reciprocal PAL model: every partner is tutor and tutee, everyone has a reduced PAL training. In this new tutor training the roles are defined. The Belgian tutor starts with a logistic role (and language role if necessary). However, on the content level everyone is equal. And every partner has the task to develop multicultural competences with the small student group when he plays the tutor role. The same information will be in the IP information documentation. This was more successfully for all students.

**IV CONCLUSION**

Doing a project with partners of different institutions created a lot of learning opportunities from the conceptual to the know-how level.
In almost every pilot we learned that the key issue is the international-intercultural competence development. Language problems occur, intercultural problems occur, but these difficulties are at the same time the best learning opportunities at the competence level. See also Lewis (2006), Paige, e.a. (2004). The international competence learning is not evident. Guidance is focused on this competence development.

On the other hand, we learned that this competence learning is not evident:

- In practice –reconfirmed by a NVAO study day in Den Haag (12-01-12) - international students form separate groups, with few contacts with local students. This is not easy to avoid but a missed chance for internationalisation@home.
- By starting support before arrival, bringing local students in contact with the mobility student and PAL working methods, we multiply contacts between local and international students. Also making project groups mixed, stimulating local students to take contact... can help.
- E-tools and social software help tutors and students to have contacts, even from a distance.
- The integral character of the support gives a lot of win-win opportunities;
- The focus on competence development, larger than the competences in ECTS-sheets of disciplines, are essential.
- Mobility students also learn content, from another viewpoint than in the own institution. This refutes the assertion that Erasmus is only fun for a lot of students. However, a well organised international learning environment is a precondition to guarantee the acquirement of international-intercultural competencies.
- The international competence learning for students@home is even more difficult. PAL and buddy working can help. Other initiatives are also necessary: international weeks, trips, international content in courses.

Literature study proves that PAL is effective in developing general competences and that tutors learn more than tutees. There is a lot of literature on PAL. PAL in internationalization is studied in Japan (little in English) and in the US. The literature is mostly about buddy working, but we focus more on the I-buddy stimulating internationalization@home. This is an open field in the pedagogical science.

However, research is not evident: how to measure this competence development? The student groups are often small and heterogeneous. Even then incoming students from the same institution have a very different starting level in their international-intercultural competence development and often also in language knowledge. See also Van Roosmalen G, e.a. (2010).

Integral guidance at internationalisation is difficult, challenging but possible.

REFERENCES