Developing international competences with an Integral student guidance in internationalisation

Robert Vierendeels, KHKempen, Lesec KULeuven, Belgium, robert.vierendeels@khk.be
Inge Vervoort KH Kempen, Lesec KULeuven, Belgium, inge.vervoort@khk.be
Agnes Dilliën KH Kempen, Belgium, agnes.dillien@khk.be.

ABSTRACT: Integral student guidance in internationalisation, PAL

1. Context of ISBI (Integral Student Support in Internationalisation)

ISBI (Integral Student Support in Internationalisation) is the name of the OOF-project 2010/16 (Education Development Fund) of the association KU Leuven. Thomas More Kempen was promotor for the project. 9 institutions of the association KU Leuven participated in it from October 2010 until October 2012.

At the start the project steering committee stated the following vision: The projects want to develop a system to monitor and guide incoming and outgoing students optimally before, during and after their experience abroad. There will also be a conscious striving for “internationalisation at home”. The project will where suitable make use of Buddy- and PAL (Peer Assisted Learning)-techniques.

In the publication "The Professional Value of ERASMUS Mobility" the International Centre for Higher Education Research (INCHER-Kassel) of the University of Kassel in Germany proved that mobile students acquire extra competences thanks to a mobility experience. Diverse studies demonstrate that employers value a mobility experience.

- QS Global Employer Survey Report 2011
- Staat een internationale ervaring goed op je cv?, Survey by VOKA, Belgian Employer’s organisation

But guidance, support and counseling are essential to maximize the potential learning outcomes by “an international experience”. This opinion is supported by Dr. J De Wit in his publication “De wet van de stimulerende achterstand?, Internationalisering van het hbo onderwijs: misvattingen en uitdagingen.”

We quote (and translate) the following important paragraph:
“A misconception assumes that students acquire intercultural and international competencies naturally when they study or do a placement abroad or when they participate in an international classroom. The truth is more complicated. It is not a priori guaranteed that those activities result in the acquisition of these competences. After all, a student can fully shut him/herself off from interactions or experiences with students and other actors/parts of the country where he/she is going, and thus from their culture. As stated, it is a common complaint that few students integrate during their study period abroad. Another complaint is that colleges make too little use of the diversity of cultures, knowledge and teaching methods that foreign students bring with them. The Veerman Committee proposes that students should be equipped to act in an international environment (Veerman Commission, 2010, p. 29). The aforementioned pilot of NVOA under twenty courses leading to a certificate "distinguished feature of internationalization", made it clear that explicitly define and measure the intercultural and international learning objectives hardly occurs. This implies that more explicit attention to this must be one of the research themes of the research group."

Support to maximize the acquirement of international-intercultural competences has been the focus of the ISBI-project with the following related questions:

- How students orientate and guide students in the possibilities of "internationalization" in Higher Education?
- How to guide students in acquiring international-intercultural competences?
- How to stimulate students to share their insights, knowledge and skills related to deepen their professional insights and knowledge in an international context.

Support to maximize other potential learning outcomes was often used buddy and PAL-techniques. The related question is:

- How to use in the international context "activating teaching methods" and "supporting ICT tools" through which students acquire additional skills?

2. **International-intercultural competences**

International-intercultural competences are described in the ISBI-project as follows:

1. **Expert Competencies**

   The student broadens and deepens his knowledge and skills related his profession in an international context.
   The student understands differences and similarities of the profession in an international context.

2. **Proficiency in foreign languages**

   The student can effectively communicate with foreign speakers.

3. **Intercultural competences**

   The student knows what culture is and is aware of the influence of culture on behavior and habits.
The student has an open and respectful attitude towards the views and behaviors of people with a different culture (cultural empathy).

4. Global Awareness: international awareness

The acquisition of these skills is supported by a document based on the outcomes of the INCA-project. This document was used in various ways. The “way how” has been described in the various train the trainer modules.

3. Other (learning) outcomes

ISBI pilot projects have been incorporated in the overall Thomas More structure and systems. Besides stimulating the development of international-intercultural competences this approach has a contribution to:

1. Social Interaction

Buddy programmes have been proven effective to improve the social interaction between students. The ideal scenario serves as the way to set up the buddy programme.

- Buddy and incoming student are in touch with one another before the actual start of the mobility (via e-mail, Facebook, Skype,…). A bond before arrival is important.

- The buddy programme implies “a personal service” for incoming students offered by local students to improve their integration.

- Integration is further be improved by:

  Local students (student associations and/or student councils) who have attention for incoming students when they organize their events and communicate e.g. in English, make membership (for a short period) possible,…

  A central programme (welcome, trips,…) offered to incoming students. The buddies are ideally involved in this programme.

  To show incoming students the way to regional organisations and sensitize these organisations to make their membership possible (limited in time) (sports clubs, academy of arts and music, cultural clubs, …)

  To show incoming students the way to organisations in the region who focus on an international public (ESN, Serve the city,…) and have an offer for leisure activities.

2. The development of extra competences using PAL (Peer Assisted Learning)-techniques

Topping and Ehly (1998) define peer assisted learning as "the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions" (1). Peer tutoring, as a specific form of peer-assisted learning, is a collaborative approach in which pairs of pupils interact to assist each other’s academic achievement, with one pupil adopting the role of tutor and the other the role of the tutee. Reciprocal peer tutoring
"employs same-age student pairs of comparable ability with the primary objective of keeping both peer student and peer teacher engaged in constructive academic activity" (Fantuzzo and Ginsburg-Block 1998, 121). This is in contrast to more usual forms of peer tutoring, which operate with different abilities in the pair and sometimes with pupils of different ages.

Thomas More was promoter of another OOF-project with the name OOF 2008/11 “PAL scores on many fields”

Peer Assisted Learning promotes the development of competences regarding: teamwork, active listening, oral presentations, summarizing, giving feedback, asking questions, counseling, …

The ISBI pilot projects demonstrated “reciprocal PAL” is the form of peer assisted learning to use in the international context. The “way how” has been described in the various train the trainer modules.

3. Building and using efficient online information tools

SignPost is an application for Smartphone developed in the context of the ISBI-project. This application offers a lot of practical information to incoming students to find their way to interesting places, organizations, activities.

Social Media were used as an extra channel for communication and to make route guidance possible. Facebook groups were set up. WIKI’s were build and updated by incoming and outgoing students for the next generation, …

Google Docs was used to follow up placement students and their employers.

Toledo, the KU Leuven digital learning environment was used in several pilot projects.

The “way how” to generate these extra “learning outcomes” has been described in the various train the trainer modules.

4. ISBI-results

The following frame was used to structure the results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROUTE/STUDENT GROUP</th>
<th>Outgoing</th>
<th>Incoming</th>
<th>I@H</th>
<th>Projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
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Summary of the publications:

- ISBI website: [https://associatie.kuleuven.be/isbi](https://associatie.kuleuven.be/isbi)
- Train the trainer – Facebook to support an Intensive Programme
- Train the trainer – Intercultural route guidance for outgoing students
- Train the trainer – Intercultural preparation day
- Train the trainer – Welcome days incl. speed friendshipping
- Train the trainer – Assignment for the course international marketing
- Train the trainer – Setting up a buddy-system
- Train the trainer – Setting up Paloma
- Train the trainer – Organizing an international event
- Train the trainer – PAL in internationalisation (Tutortraining)
- Train the trainer – PAL in an English taught module, project work, placement, English taught curriculum
- Train the trainer - Pathfinder
- Train the trainer – Organizing an orientation day in “international possibilities”
- Train the trainer – SignPost
- Train the trainer – Evaluating the level of foreign language knowledge
- Train the trainer – Guidance upon return
- Train the trainer – Organising a returning back day
- Train the trainer – Intercultural route guidance for incoming students
- Train the trainer – setting up a WIKI in internationalization

5. Contact Information

Thomas More Kempen
Kleinhoefstraat 4 | 2440 Geel | Belgium
Tel. + 32 (0)14 56 23 10 |
www.thomasmore.be

Project coordinator:
Inge Vervoort
inge.vervoort@khk.be

Promotor:
Agnes Dillien
agnes.dillien@khk.be

Co-promotor:
Rob Vierendeels
rob.vierendeels@khk.be