



Cultivating Intercultural Competency through Co-Created Student Opportunity

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Abstract

Internationalisation efforts across higher education in the UK has led to increasingly diversification of student populations and has in tandem created organic opportunity for greater intercultural learning (ICC) (Deardorff, 2006). With an increasingly mobile workforce, ICC is now considered a key 21st century competence and graduate attribute. However, despite increasingly diverse 'home' and international student cohorts many universities are facing real challenges in creating genuine peer-peer engagement amongst UK and overseas students for a number of reasons relating to; poor cultural awareness, negative stereotyping, power relations and 'fear' due to lack of engagement with the 'other' (Stephan and Stephan, 2000 cited in Harrison and Peacock, 2010) thus suggesting that diversification of student population does not automatically create or facilitate diversity in student interaction (Haines, 2007). The literature suggests that greater strategic planning of non-face threatening opportunity for students to collaborate in order to develop their intercultural awareness (ICC) by universities would be beneficial in not only fostering advanced ICC and thus boosting global graduate attributes, but to also create a more inclusive and cohesive student community (Leask, 2009). This working paper discusses key findings so far from a student-led collaborative pilot project by the University of Leeds in conjunction with the British Association of Lecturers English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP) of business students ICC development whilst undertaking student-designed intercultural group projects. The study foregrounds the 'transformative' process of working interculturality to build; cross-cultural understanding, resilience and communication skills in the forthcoming generation of graduates to overcome perceived barriers. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected throughout the semester and coded utilising an a priori method. Key findings will reflect the role universities will play in facilitating structured collaborative co-curricular student-led opportunity for deep and meaningful ICC engagement; in turn helping to create and shape important insights into a rapidly changing social landscape to support 21st century graduates in being able to tackle Grand Challenges ahead.

Keywords: Internationalisation at home, collaborative learning, transformative learning, intercultural competency, global education, group work, international education.

References

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