The International Classroom

How to transform an international educational practice into an Intercultural Classroom?

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The context of the study

- English taught professional BBA bachelor
- 360 students (year 1 to 4) of which 26% is international
- Predetermined curriculum
- Project group based
- Teachers are not automatically designers (team-teaching)
Different approaches

1. **Instrumental orientation: focus on means**
   - English
   - Having international students and staff
   - Intercultural competences will be automatically acquired

2. **Integral process-based orientation: focus on goals**
   - Learning outcomes are integrated
   - Facilitating co-creative intercultural learning processes

**International Practice into Intercultural Classroom**


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The Intercultural Classroom

Its main aim is that through interaction knowledge, ideas and theories from multiple cultural contexts are shared, explored and scrutinized (intercultural engagement) in order to generate new knowledge and action within disciplines and professional practices (collaborative knowledge building)

Lecturers are the key

- Application differs in professions and across disciplinary groups.

→ IC needs to be developed within the context of the study programme.

→ This requires involvement of teaching staff.

Based on: Leask (2012), Nuffic (2014a, 2014b)

Participatory Action Research

Overall objective: How to transform this international educational practice into an Intercultural Classroom?

12 participants: mix of perspectives:
- Dutch and international programme
- Senior and junior teachers
- Designers, coordinators and teachers
- Dutch and international backgrounds

Three phases:
Phase 1: exploring the current educational practice
Phase 2: designing and implementing interventions
Phase 3: key elements for sustainable change
Participatory Action Research

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Underlying views teachers

**In what way do teachers recognize cultural diversity?**
Process of Intercultural Development

- **realize**
  - Translating it into actual behaviour and actions
  - Third culture building

- **reconcile**
  - Learn with others
  - Valuing different cultural perspectives

- **respect**
  - Learning from others
  - Understanding the different cultural perspectives

- **recognize**
  - Learn about others
  - Becoming aware of cultural differences


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How teachers view cultural diversity in their class

- “I see students as the same in which I need to pour knowledge”
- “I only know what nationalities my students have, but I don’t know about their cultural backgrounds”
- “I only see the Dutch culture”
- “I do see different personalities/ types of students”
- “I see so much different cultural perceptions emerge in my class that I sometime don’t know what to discuss and what not to discuss”

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Underlying views teachers

In what ways are teachers dealing with cultural diversity?

Ways to manage cultural diversity

- **ignored**
  - cultural diversity is irrelevant or should be fused together into one homogenous culture
  - assimilation of all students in the preferred dominant white model.

- **minimised**
  - culture diversity causes problems or threats which need to be managed to avoid or limit negative impacts
  - tendency to “exoticize” international students and treat cultural identities as fixed.

- **utilised**
  - cultural diversity is an opportunity for learning and generating synergy
  - be recognised as a student-centred approach. Students get engaged in a process of dialogue to stimulate critical thinking.

based on: Schneider & Barsoux (2003), Warren (2005), Seymen (2006), Adler & Gundersen (2008),
How teachers deal with cultural diversity

**Ignorance**
I do not have a real vision on it, aren’t we just talking about teaching in general?

**Conscious ignorance**
I cannot use cultural diversity because I do not have enough knowledge.

**Assimilation**
We are cloning the students, BECAUSE...

**Adaptation**
I try to / I do take into account (cultural) differences by adapting my behaviour, BUT...

How teachers deal with cultural diversity

**Including examples from abroad**
As a teacher I (can) ask students about their international examples, BUT...

**Building on significant different cultural perspectives**
There are so much opportunities to build on the cultural diversity present in class and to use students’ cultural input to generate knowledge BUT...

**The power of the teacher**
I realised how much power I have as a teacher which students I empower.
Changes the game

Underlying educational beliefs

In what way do teachers view teaching the students?
Educational ideologies

**Expert**
- Reproduction and transmission of absolute truth
- Controlling the educational environment
- Designing and teaching are divided roles

**Developmental**
- A continuous development experience of the individual in which the content is never taken for granted
- Meaningful learning experience
- More power and autonomy for teachers

**Co-creative**
- Transformative view: empower students in becoming effective members of society
- Knowledge is critiqued and re-constructed
- Power is more equally distributed among the teacher and learners


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**All three ideologies are reflected**

**Expert**
- Pouring knowledge into the heads of students.
- I think that students would not see me as a good teacher if I don’t give the answers to their questions.

**Developmental**
- Solving the puzzle together: students asked a lot of critical questions to each other.
- My colleague changes the class based on students’ needs, I should do that more.

**Co-creative**
- I see the classroom as a lab: a safe place where you can experiment
- Challenging to take it a step further
The power of the students

- Students want the “correct” answer
- Students come to school taking a passive role
- Students want teachers to take away uncertainties
- Students want to be treated equally (start shopping)

Team-teaching is prohibitive

- Room teachers have depends on the approach of the coordinator
  
  “my role is to be the supervisor, dot, and live up to that role”
  “great opportunity emerged, but the manual indicated that...”

- Teachers are expected to be generalists
- Staff meetings
It is exhausting

Let’s go back to teaching now.

Focus on the content (check and control) makes me immune to the process.

Although the workshops were designed that I take a facilitating role, I explain and teach a lot (know-it all).

It brings unpredictability so it increases uncertainty for teachers -> you need to dare to do it

Teaching this subject is the job I get paid for: so don’t waste time on doing things in your class we did not agree on (Dutch pragmatism).

IC is currently an addition: it depends on how much time you have left.

Students do not currently see the necessity/relevance.

What needs to be changed?

- Gain and share more perspectives/knowledge both individually and as a team.
- Gain more knowledge from the students.
What needs to be changed?

If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough.
– Albert Einstein

Teachers need to be specialist chameleons

“we should claim our differences”
What needs to be changed?

Be stubborn about your goals, and flexible about your methods.

Any questions?
References


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