

Internationalising teachers and teaching



Internationalisation could be seen as the defining feature of human society today. Modern travel, ease of communication, and economic and environmental interdependence, make it vitally important that teacher educators transform their own, and their students', learning and teaching practices, to ensure that future generations are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to live and work in this internationalised, globalised world.

Internationalising teachers and the education they deliver to pupils is important because, as Hytten and Bettez (2008, p.170) state:

To live sustainable and healthy lives in our home countries, we need to understand the impact and consequences of our choices and actions on peoples and places beyond our local region.

In other words, intending teachers need to learn and teach internationally.

Internationalisation in the classroom

We can all do the 3 'S's – Saris, Steel bands and Samosas –, have 'International Weeks' that celebrate the different religious festivals, and display and use international greetings such as *selamat dating*, *akwaba*, *swaagat hai*, *foo ying*, and *migalaba*, but this is not really internationalising teaching, nor does it internationalise teachers.

Curriculum content and delivery, for example, in the form of producing a stall at school 'representing' England, might result in some toy London buses, or pictures of the Queen, Big Ben and the Beatles. 'Fish and chips' or 'bangers and mash' might be served as indicators of traditional English food, and Morris Dancers might perform a traditional English folk dance or two – but none of these are effective ways of internationalising teaching, or teachers. Instead, they represent surface characteristics of this particular country. They may be traditional images, but they are certainly not representative of most people most of the time in England, or of the real, lived culture in England today. All too often, activities such as these reinforce unrepresentative stereotypes, divorced from the real lives and daily concerns of those they attempt to represent.

Emphasising what appears to be culturally strange or exotic can lead to unrealistic, or even negative, views of other people, a perspective of 'us' and 'them', and one that is aptly described by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* (1979). It is a form of 'tokenism' or 'cultural tourism', rather than genuine internationalised education, and has been described as such in much of the educational literature.

True internationalisation of teachers and teaching requires that we build on issues of common concern across people and nations, the things we share, and really need to know about and understand, such as climate change, poverty, multinational corporations, social justice and human rights. It isn't about celebration of differences (though that can be fun) and it doesn't happen by simple co-location, or by chance. Instead, it has to be worked at and engaged with, on a number of different levels.

In 1990, Duncan Graham wrote in his foreword to *Education for Citizenship* (NCC, 1990) that,

Education for citizenship is essential for every pupil. It helps each of them to understand the duties, responsibilities and rights of every citizen and promotes concern for the values by which a civilised society is identified – justice, democracy, respect for the rule of law. (preface, p.1)

In 2009, it seems appropriate that we apply and extend that statement to cover and pertain to education for international citizenship.

The government level

The British governments' perspective on internationalising teachers and teaching is most clearly presented in 'Putting the World into World Class Education – an International Strategy for Education, Skills and Children's Services', published in 2004, which contains three key goals for internationalisation:

- 1 Equipping our children, young people and adults for life in a global society and for work in a global economy.
- 2 Engaging with our international partners to achieve their goals and ours.
- 3 Maximising the contribution of our education and training sector, and university research, to our overseas trade and investment.

While the economic benefits of internationalisation are important to most nations, they are not the only benefits, nor necessarily the most important ones. Equipping people with the skills and knowledge to live and work happily and harmoniously with their peers in the international arena and to work together towards the achievement of shared goals are tremendous social and cultural benefits that accrue through internationalisation.

That same government document names eight key concepts that should be the focus of internationalised education:

- human rights
- diversity
- sustainable development
- values and perceptions
- social justice
- citizenship
- conflict resolution
- interdependence

These concepts need to be woven into mission statements at all levels of education, and especially into teacher training courses, in order to demonstrate that diversity is valued; that our future graduates, and children in our schools, will acquire intercultural skills; that our curriculum, textbooks and teaching resources actively incorporate cross-cultural and international positions and perspectives; and that our assessments and examinations value, and test for, the acquisition of international knowledge and understanding of these issues.

Implementation of such mission statements result in teachers, and their pupils, knowing about global citizenship, social justice, rights and responsibilities, who are international in outlook and competences (not local and parochial), and who have acquired a global conscience (Knight, 1999).

The teacher level

To accomplish all this, teachers will need opportunities to develop empathy and intercultural awareness, opportunities to appreciate similarities between people across the world, and opportunities to come to understand and respect differences.

Internationalised teachers and teaching are built through thinking, listening, discussing, conversing, playing, arguing, learning, debating, exploring and exchanging ideas with others, from many different cultures (Cousin, 2006, p.35). So, how can we do it?

Immersion

Complete immersion into a supportive intercultural environment can work well for trainee teachers; for example, undertaking a two-week placement in a completely different education environment to the state school system in England with its compulsory National Curriculum. Some trainee teachers have done and continue to do that, emerging as critical, reflective internationalised teachers possessing significantly different and changed perspectives on both their home education system and those in use elsewhere.

Immersion placements in England, in independent faith schools, international schools or progressive private schools, such as A.S. Neils' Summerhill, were undertaken by students who couldn't travel overseas, and resulted in many positive effects, encouraging those students to 'think outside the box' of a highly structured state system. However, many travelled abroad for their immersion placements, taking the opportunity to experience first-hand teaching and learning in several Commonwealth countries and in a variety of educational contexts, such as South African Farm schools,

village schools in rural India (run by an NGO), and an international school based in Malaysia.

These immersion placements really did, and do, make a difference. Student teachers meet with and work alongside peers in real life, everyday contexts and situations, as collaborators rather than cultural tourists. They see and experience other ways of doing things, ways that are different but that can be equally successful; they learn other ways of thinking about teaching, and they learn other ways in which to teach. Immersion placements really do work. Students return with changed perceptions about intercultural and internationalised education.

The student teachers who undertake immersion placements, at home and overseas, go willingly, with open minds and curiosity; they want to learn about education in other countries; they want to find out about alternatives and understand them from different cultural and environmental perspectives; they want to travel; and they want to do their own research.

In its early manifestation, their taught course required them to think about, select and research an alternative education system, and in particular to focus on one aspect of it; for example, Korea's high achievements in mathematics, girls' literacy in India, and early years' bilingual education in New Zealand. Students had to acquire background knowledge of the selected education system, and its cultural and historical context. Then they had to reflect critically on that information in order to compare and contrast what they had found with the state provision in England. Some students found this difficult, most found it challenging, but none dropped out.

During their immersion placements, the students kept journals recording their experiences and reflections. These informed their later case -study presentations to their peers, where as much as possible of these wide-ranging experiences and knowledge was shared.

They also explored a variety of teaching ideas related to diversity, democracy, justice, respect, rights and responsibilities, and they worked together to turn their immersion experiences into meaningful lessons and resources for teaching Personal and Social Education/ Citizenship Education in English primary schools. Discussions of democracy and school councils took on a whole new dimension when direct experience of the 'tribunal' at Summerhill was available in their own classroom; cultural diversity and respect for human rights became much more vivid and better understood when students spoke of their experiences teaching English to Hmong (First Nation) children at a reservation school in the USA, or singing songs with South African pupils at their rural Farm School.

Immersion placements develop confidence and responsibility among student teachers. They enable the sharing and exploration of a wide range of different experiences, knowledge, opinions and viewpoints among peers with other immersion experiences; they enable the appreciation of diversity and common humanity to take place first hand, *in situ* – in other words, exactly the kind of things internationalised education requires them to develop in their pupils. As the Crick Report (QCA, 1998) argues, children cannot be simply taught how to be effective citizens or to have social understanding, they need to learn from experience, to practise and develop the necessary skills. So too their teachers, and immersion placements allow them to do exactly that.

To internationalise teachers and teaching we must instil its underlying philosophy and values into those who will teach it. It must become owned by, and meaningful to, future teachers. We cannot extend the experience and understanding of children unless we extend the experience and understanding of those who teach them. Immersion placements are effective vehicles through which to develop those experiences and understandings. They actually effect change in student teachers, producing a value shift that outlives any curriculum guidance document or transmission of second-hand knowledge, and they have far greater impact upon their future teaching.

In the student teachers' own words:

I especially enjoyed the alternative education placement and found it fascinating to learn about other education systems. Anyone who has not taken the course has really missed out on a valuable learning experience.

The alternative placement was fantastic! I learnt so much from it and will use and adapt a lot for use in school. I have really enjoyed this course... The only thing that I feel could have been added was maybe a bit more on alternatives – places we have not been, ideas we have not seen through our experiences.

By widening the experiences and perspectives of student teachers through immersion placements we also develop their understanding of, and ability to contribute to, education's role in promoting international harmony and social justice.

Others have used immersion placements with intending teachers; for example, Dooly and Villanueva (2006, p.225) report a European Union 'transnational project' that is very similar to the one described above. Their transnational project sought to develop internationally-minded teachers through joint training, which required a period of 'full immersion in a different culture' (p.226).

Immersion works because it enables student teachers to think 'outside the box' of their own local cultures and education systems and the stereotypes that can form around the 'unknown'. It helps them to become the internationalised teachers we need who can genuinely deliver a truly internationalised education.

Conclusion

David Killick, Head of International Programmes at Leeds Metropolitan University suggests that,

The key issues of our time, from climate change to human migration... require researchers and professionals capable of and inclined towards finding global solutions – and so our graduates must be able to contribute to such solutions. Such solutions require the tools of effective intercultural communication, and a curiosity, openness and willingness to engage with others. In short the art of communicating across boundaries – whether those boundaries are with other disciplines, other professions, other nationalities, or other local and regional cultures. These are the contexts which frame the education we need to be offering and they form the rationale and the framework for an internationalised curriculum. (Killick, 2006, p.36)

Immersion of teachers into other educational environments helps achieve these goals. And teachers are key to internationalising teaching and our future generations of global citizens. It is not easy – it is hard to organise and incurs cost in terms of time and money – but it is an effective way forward for the internationalisation of teachers and teaching.

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