

WORKSHOP REPORT

Internationalisation and the inclusive curriculum

Author: Alicia Prowse

Contact Details:

Dr Alicia Prowse

Principal Lecturer in Learning and Teaching (Student Experience)
Centre for Learning and Teaching,
Cavendish North
Tel: 0161 247 6136
Email: a.prowse@mmu.ac.uk



Introduction

In this short workshop session we tried to achieve two things:

1. Explore our attitudes to international students and check that we aren't using a deficit model.

In other words, moving away from *'How do we cope with international students in the classroom?'* to *'How do we create a classroom environment that is welcoming to all students and helps make the most of what every student has to contribute to what happens in the classroom?'*

2. Consider how we approach inclusive curriculum design in general.

So, do we see international students as 'other' and how do we design classroom activity around our own ways of approaching diversity in the classroom?

To help us understand the kind of environment we need to create in the internationalised classroom we investigated each others' 'educational culture'. In pairs, we asked each other the following questions:

For **you** (thinking back to your own school and university career):

- What is learning?

- What is a teacher?
- What is a student?
- What behaviours are expected in various class settings (e.g. lecture, laboratory, studio, fieldwork etc.)?
- What is assessment – is there a correct answer? Are multiple attempts allowed?
- What are the outcomes of assessment? What is feedback ?

It quickly became apparent that even the same environment produces very different experiences of educational culture. Two participants in the session discovered, as they talked in a pair, that both had been to an all girls school – one in a culture where they felt very liberated by the supportive teachers who were all ‘feminist’ and ‘encouraged you to feel you could do anything’, and the other in a culture who felt very ‘suppressed by the strict and authoritarian regime’. Amazingly, as these two people continued to talk, they slowly realised that *they had attended the same school* in the south of England! This exercise was useful in helping staff to think about the origins of our own assumptions about educational norms and behaviours and our attitudes towards what goes on during the teaching, learning and assessment process. Attitudes that ultimately affect how we design curricula for our students.

We looked briefly at the ways in which we approach diversity within the classroom. Leach (2011) has characterised five ‘positions’ on diversity in the classroom which range from ‘universal’ (‘I treat all students as equal’) through ‘group’ (‘I identify specific groups and attend to their learning needs’) to ‘individual’ (‘I treat all students as individuals and attend to their learning needs appropriately’). There wasn’t time to explore these positions fully but we agreed that on different occasions we might use any one of these strategies. Leach concludes that there are things to be gained from each approach. Therefore, combining these positions to take the most useful practical ideas from each and use these to develop workable learning and teaching activities was most likely to reap rewards.

Leach, L. 2011. ‘I treat all students as equal’: further and higher education teachers’ responses to diversity. *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 35(2) 247-263.