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EUROPEAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

The Effects of Internationalisation at three Scottish Universities: Understanding the International Student Experience through Collaborative Picturing

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22 SES 12 A, Internationalisation: Experiences and Support

Paper Session

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Room: NM-Theatre R

Chair: Carolina Guzmán-Valenzuela

Contribution

The Effects of Internationalisation at three Scottish Universities: Understanding the International Student Experience through Collaborative Picturing

By way of a preliminary understanding, according to a broad definition from Knight, (2006) internationalisation consists of two components: namely internationalisation at home referring to activities that help students develop international understanding and intercultural skills and internationalisation abroad referring to all forms of education crossing borders, mobility of students, teachers, scholars, programmes, courses, curriculum and projects. The term is often used loosely to refer to any activity that involves cross border, cross cultural or international connotations and has therefore, according to Knight (2010:14), become a 'catch all phrase'. Internationalisation in this context can also be framed within exchange relations according to Emerson's power-dependency theory (Emerson, 1964) locating power at the interdependencies among actors embedded in social relations. It may also be argued that the discourses of internationalisation illustrate Foucault's power-knowledge concept (Foucault, 1977) which states it is not only power that has the exclusive right to generate knowledge, but also that knowledge gives power over people.

International education is not a new phenomenon with international connections being sustained since medieval times (Knight & De Wit, 1995). However, it seems that the scope of 'internationalisation' can now be found to have a particular meaning to some when applied to the strategic planning of higher educational institutions, and is concerned with

maintaining and developing a cultural and educational identity of the local campus environment while opening doors to learning, teaching and research opportunities with a global 'perspective'. Nonetheless, interpretations of global 'perspective' depend on which ideological or political paradigm or vantage point is taken, i.e. globalisation and economic competition from a conservative or neoliberal agenda or intercultural and transnational /cosmopolitan relations from a more liberal / socialist perspective, or a combination thereof.

On arrival at a new campus in new country, international students are at a crucial stage in their academic careers, transitioning from study or work in their home countries to study in the UK. Although some students adapt easily to new challenges both socially and academically, others may have difficulties adapting to different ways of thinking and different cultural expectations. This leads to our main question: What is it like to be an international student in Scotland?

The objectives of this research are to have a deeper understanding of social, academic, economic and cultural issues affecting international students studying in Scotland and a more nuanced understanding of the quality and kinds of relationships formed in cross-cultural encounters in Higher Education.

This research will use collaborative group work techniques to gather information. Focus groups discussions will be employed alongside a collaborative drawing technique called the rich picture (RP). We intend to use the RP tool to gather insight because visuals have the vast capacity to communicate irrespective of possible language, culture and education barriers and thus making it useful for communicating with international student participants. The RP is a familiar tool used in computing information systems (Berg & Pooley, 2013) to gather understanding about human activity for system design to assist the exploration of different world views within a complex situation. The RP is a physical picture drawn by many hands which encourages discussion and debate for groups and allows them to arrive at an agreed understanding which makes it a powerful device in participatory processes. In recent work (Berg & Guion Akdağ, under review) the RP was used to aid understanding of the issues facing international students by comparing student feedback forms with the RP. This previous work suggested that the RP is a good complimentary tool to formal methods of enquiry and thus gives insight into more tacit perceptions from students such as emotion, sentiment, reaction and mood.

Method

Through the use of focus group RP drawing sessions, a series of focus workshops will be run in early 2016, asking international students to collaboratively draw pictures relating to transition and adaptation to their new learning, living and social environment. These workshops are both informative and valuable to this research but also a positive community experience for the participating students to meet other students in similar situations.

In total, five focus groups will take place at three universities in Scotland. Each focus group involves approximately 20 international students, working in small groups of four or five students, drawing a RP collaboratively and then talking about what they have drawn. Each session begins with a facilitator explaining the purpose of the research. The RP tool is explained and justified as an alternative method of gathering information from people which is essentially using Art as a form of enquiry, allowing tacit unconscious thoughts to emerge through the picturing process. The participants are informed that no artistic skill is required and are then given the opportunity to draw a RP. Following this, students are recorded talking about their pictures. Ethics and consent forms are completed to allow the filming of this process although the recordings will be used only for transcription purposes and any information reported or published will be anonymised prior to dissemination.

In total, 20 RPs and transcripts from each group discussion are then analysed using the Berg RP Framework (Berg, 2013) and categorised into a number of themes. The framework (Berg, 2013) is a sizable tool and cannot, taking into account the scope of this research be used in its entirety for a full investigation. Small subsets or core themes have been adopted from the framework which will be used through content analysis to analyse the RPs in this study. One of the core themes will look at the issues faced by international students in three institutes of Higher Education in Scotland.

Content analysis can be applied to any type of information, not just textual. Bell et al (2015) propose that RPs can be analysed in order to tell us about the dynamics and mind-set of those composing the RP. Content analysis is widely used in the field of social science and this research proposes to explore similarities and differences between the RPs and common elements across each group, adding an extra dimension to the results.

Expected Outcomes

Previous research with international students using RPs (Berg & Guion Akdağ, under review) highlighted quite a negative atmosphere existed amongst a group of predominantly Chinese and Arabic international students studying on a pre-sessional English course. This new research is more ambitious taking place over three universities with students currently studying on postgraduate degree courses and a wider range of nationalities are involved.

According to Bell et al (2015), although RPs may appear to be anarchic and lacking in structure, they also seem to be resilient to a variety of external pressures, arguably offering potential for shared thinking and communication. In these times of increasing numbers of international students arriving in the UK, social groupings of all kinds need to use resilient methods in order to face the multiple challenges of today. Resilient and sustainable communities are those that embrace their image and understanding of the truth and thus they are powerful (Ibid) and this kind of voice may be missing in the international student community.

The RP is a platform or permissive environment for a collaborative voice to challenge the rules and delve into a visual world of imagery and creative discovery. The outcome of this study will help us explore the challenges facing higher education as a result of internationalisation. This must involve attempting to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue through international collaboration, allowing the voices of all stakeholders, including international students, to be heard. The central contribution of our research is to encourage international students to share intercultural stories about living and studying in Scotland so we can better understand the issues facing this community in order to inform learning and teaching policy providers within three Scottish universities.

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