International education: a force for peace and cross-cultural understanding?

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Abstract

This paper discusses the notion that the international sojourn has the potential to transform sojourners into cultural mediators who carry the power to improve global relations. A year-long ethnographic study of the adjustment experiences of international postgraduate students in England revealed a universal early enthusiasm for cross-cultural contact that was matched by a widespread adoption of segregated patterns of interacting. The most common friendship networks were described by bonds with conationals, and yet all students attested to an increase in their cultural learning and mindfulness by the end of the sojourn. Nevertheless, intercultural competence was maximised only in those *few* students who pursued a multicultural strategy of interaction, leading the researcher to call on Higher Education Institutions to instigate policies to encourage lasting cross-cultural contact.

Keywords

International campus	diversity	cultural learning
Segregation	host contact	evolution

Introduction

It is widely recognised that the internationalised university campus offers an important meeting ground for cross-cultural contact, which refers to interactions between people of differing national and cultural backgrounds (Gudykunst 1998). As international student numbers continue to grow, both the international and domestic student body can benefit from a diverse student population: cross-cultural contact offers students the opportunity to improve their cross-cultural communication skills, which will ultimately improve their employability after graduation (Ledwith and Seymour 2001; Cushner and Karim 2004). Furthermore, cross-cultural contact can lead to the deconstruction of negative stereotypes (Hofstede 2001) and to the development of a culturally relativist mindset (Ryan and Hellmundt 2005), which has important implications for future intergroup relations (Martin and Harrell 2004). Many writers, from Bock in 1970 to Gudykunst in 1998 to Cushner and Karim in 2004, state that increased tolerance transforms sojourners into human bridges between cultures upon their return home: the theory is that the development of a nonethnocentric value system enables the sojourner to go on to become a mediator between cultures (Bochner 1981, 1986). Indeed, Huntingdon (1993) and Gudykunst (1998) claim that the cultural learning that takes place during international education will lead to a reduction in world conflict. This is incidentally a claim also made by d'Amore (1988) for tourism, whilst O'Reilly's study (2006) found an association between backpacking and the development of a sense of common humanity.

However, Ward (2001) claims that the outcome of improved cross-cultural skills is a benefit of the sojourn that is too frequently hypothesised and rarely empirically supported. Indeed, many studies have observed both a lack of contact between home and international students (Furnham and Erdman 1995; Volet and Ang 1998; Spencer-Rodgers 2001; Ward et al. 2005; de Vita 2005; Sovic 2008) and a tendency towards ghettoised patterns of interaction within the international student body (Dyal and Dyal 1980; Kim 1988; Ward 2001; Gu et al. 2008; Sovic 2008; Brown 2008). It has been observed that a lack of host contact is caused by a perceived indifference towards international students on the part of domestic students (Ward 2001; Sovic 2008) and incidences of racism have also been reported (Pai 2006; Brown 2009). The home student perspective remains undocumented due to a lack of research in this area. Meanwhile mononational interaction is attributed to a desire to hear and speak the same language and to access instrumental support (Kim 1988; Kramsch 1993; Ward 2001; Brown 2008); a few studies have also shown a tendency to form monocultural bonds, with students citing shared culture as the main motivating force (Brown 2008; Gu et al. 2008).

Given that existing research reveals a tendency among students *not* to maximise the cultural learning opportunity offered by the internationalised campus, it is arguable that the positive outcomes promised by cross-cultural contact are rarely achieved either by the home or international student body. Gu et al. (2008) argue that whilst the emotional and interpersonal benefits of differing forms of interaction mean that *all* friendship bonds should be encouraged, more should be done by Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to encourage intergroup interaction so that the benefits associated with cross-cultural contact can be realised. This is vindicated by Berry's (1994) assertion of an undisputed link between the outcome of the sojourn and interaction patterns. Drawing on findings from an ethnographic study of the adjustment process of a 150-strong cohort of international postgraduate students at a university in England, this paper aims to investigate students' interaction patterns, and to discuss the link between interaction and the outcome of the international sojourn. Given the emphasis in this paper on friendship networks, a classification of the various types of strategies that can be adopted by sojourners in the new cultural setting will be briefly specified, following work by Berry (1994; 1997), Piontkowski et al. (2000) and Martin and Harrell (2004):

- The sojourner may adopt a *monocultural* strategy, clinging to their own culture. This is the segregation approach, which implies an absence of substantial relations with the larger society, along with maintenance of ethnic identity, heritage and traditions. This usually refers to ties among same-nationality members, referred to as mononational or conational ties (Ward 2001), but it can also refer to ties between people of a distinct culture.

- Alternatively, the sojourner may adopt an assimilationist apporach, rejecting their own culture and replacing it with the new one. This involves relinquishing cultural identity and moving into the larger society by way of absorption of a non-dominant group into an established dominant group.
- The sojourner may become *bicultural*, retaining their own and learning a new culture. This is the integration approach, which implies the maintenance of some cultural identity as well as movement to become an integral part of a larger societal framework.
- The sojourner may become *marginalised*, renouncing their own heritage and refusing a relationship with the dominant group. This involves feelings of alienation and loss of identity, as groups lose cultural psychological contact with both their traditional culture and the larger society.
- The sojourner may become *multicultural*, retaining their own and learning several other cultures. Indeed, this is the adjustment strategy that is often advocated, as it allows individuals to acquire the values that provide the basis for modern pluralistic society such as tolerance, cultural relativism and respect (e.g. Gudykunst 1998; Ward et al. 2001; Kim 2001; Gilroy 2007). This strategy is relevant to this study as it was associated by students with the maximisation of the positive outcomes just mentioned.

In this paper, the above strategies will be referred to when describing the interaction patterns adopted by international students during their time in England; the explanation for their choice of strategy will be explored, and its implications for the outcome of the sojourn will also be discussed.

Methodology

The aim of the study from which this paper's findings are taken was to track the adjustment experiences of a cohort of international postgraduate students in the South of England. This aim was fulfilled by adopting an ethnographic approach which offered the opportunity to study students in a natural setting over a long period, using the twin methods of participant observation and in-depth interviews that characterize ethnography (Fetterman 1998). The setting chosen for this research was the Graduate School at a university in the south of England, as the researcher worked there as a lecturer in English for Academic Purposes, and was already 'in the field'; she had direct access to students and ample opportunity for observation in an overt participant role. She did not mark students' work and had no input into assessment, and this was important when considering ethical issues. Of the 150 postgraduate international students in the Graduate School, the majority (approximately two thirds) were from South East Asia, reflecting the most common source of international students for UK universities (UKCISA 2009); around a third were from Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Comprising the SE Asian cohort were students from China, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Korea; comprising the European cohort were students from Slovenia, Russia, German, France, Spain and the UK. Outside these two cohorts were students from Iran (1), South Africa (1), Jordan (1) and Turkey (1). All of the students in the Graduate School were studying on the same twelve-month Masters course, and all were observed over this period.

Ethical approval to undertake this study was given by the university's Research Ethics Committee, and informed consent of participants was obtained to observe and record observations on a daily basis; all students were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. In addition, 13 students from 13 different nations volunteered to be interviewed at regular intervals over a 12 month period (each pre-arranged, tape-recorded interview normally lasted two hours). Although it is acknowledged that no individual can represent an entire culture, culture clearly has a defining impact on an individual's make-up (Hofstede 1991), and the researcher sought an interview sample of diverse nationalities in the understanding that they would be offered access to experience of the sojourn from many different cultural perspectives (The 13 interviewees were from: Indonesia, Taiwan, China, Malaysia, Slovenia, Russia, Germany, Brazil, Thailand, Korea, Jordan, Iran, South Africa). Interviews were complemented and enriched by observational research, which involved opportunistic conversations with students outside these formally arranged times (both interviewees and the rest of the 150-strong cohort), in the tutor's office, in the corridor, in the classroom and elsewhere on the campus.

Ethnography is initially inductive (Fetterman 1998), therefore the first interview with students was informal and unstructured, and as advised by Spradley (1979), open questions were used to stimulate conversation. Examples of questions include:

Can you tell me about the week leading up to your departure?

Could you describe your first day of arrival in the UK?

Please talk to me about your first day at the university.

Ethnography demands that follow-up questions are asked in response to what participants say (Spradley 1979), for example, questions included:

You mentioned feeling homesick, can you tell me a bit more about that?

What was it that excited you about the mixed-nationality group?

Why were you so nervous about speaking in English?

Subsequent interviews were guided by the topics that emerged from the analysis of data: these included language problems, loneliness and companionship, food habits, academic pressures and identity confusion. These emergent themes influenced the field research, as the researcher sought to corroborate the interview findings; supporting data were thus obtained from the study of the rest of the 150-strong student cohort, who were observed in a variety of situations, and whose conversations with the researcher helped to build a richer picture of the international student experience.

The decision to study an institution at a particular time is significant (Ball 1983). Students have particularly intense emotional experiences at the start of term when they are attempting to adapt not only to a new sociocultural environment but also to unfamiliar academic situations. Thus both interviews and observations started at the beginning of the academic year (September 2003), countering the criticism often made of studies of adjustment, that they are hampered by sojourners' retrospective accounts (Church 1982; Ward 2001). Observation was conducted on a daily basis for the 12-month period whilst interviews were carried out four times with all 13 interviewees (in September, January, April and September). Data collection was completed at the end of the academic year (September 2004), which meant that their total academic experience was captured.

After the first few weeks of data collection, preliminary analysis and data coding were carried out. This involved repeated reading of field notes and transcripts until themes or categories began to emerge. Recurrent topics were highlighted, to be followed up in further interviews and observation. A full analysis was undertaken after the data collection period was completed. A codebook was created during analysis of the first round of interview transcripts and field notes, which was updated as the data collection proceeded. After each round, the transcript was scrutinised, with the aid of different colour highlighter pens to identify recurring words. Codes and categories therefore emerge from the data, from the insider perspective, depending on how often something was mentioned by the participant (Spradley 1979). At the end of the data collection period (September 2004), the researcher began to analyse and organise interview and observational data into the major research categories, an example of which was *interaction*.

With regard to the generalisability of findings, it is acknowledged that a small interviewee sample and the selection of one case will make it difficult to move to general classifications. Nevertheless, ethnographers often feel that similar settings are likely to produce similar data, and that theory-based generalisation can be achieved, involving the transfer of theoretical concepts found from one situation to other settings and conditions (Daymon and Holloway 2002). The setting for this research was chosen for the ability to transfer the findings to similar settings, i.e. Higher Education institutions that recruit international postgraduate students, and also to similar actors, i.e. international postgraduates on a one-year intensive Masters programme. Furthermore, credibility was gained through a review of the literature on adjustment (Seale 1999), which reflects many of this study's findings, and point to a common experience among international sojourners. By focusing on interaction patterns in the international student cohort, this paper will enter the debate on the transformative nature of the sojourn.

Embracing cultural diversity in friendship

Increasing intercultural competence was a theme of Interview 1, which took place in September upon arrival: all 13 interviewees commented positively on the informal education opportunity represented by the international make-up of the course to learn about cultures they had never met before and may never come across again. The following comment is indicative of an enthusiasm that was universal:

> *It is great to mix with so many nationalities like this. For me the interaction with others is really important, just as important as the academic.* German student

Gudykunst (1998) states that the interculturally competent person is someone whose cognitive, behavioural and affective characteristics are open to growth beyond the psychological parameters of any one culture, a 'model for human development' unbound by original culture norms and values. The attributes associated with intercultural competence are, according to Koester and Lustig (2003), respect, empathy, cultural knowledge, tolerance for ambiguity and the capacity to manage interaction. A growth in cultural learning was frequently credited with the potential to reduce global tension, as students were optimistic about the transformative power of their exposure to new cultures:

> *There are lots of students from everywhere, all different cultures; you know you have a good experience. Lots of foreigners, people they live in peace, really. You know, it's a good atmosphere. We will always remember this!* Jordanian student

> *When I came, I had never spoken to any Greeks. Now we know how we are alike. We would not support a war like before. You have to travel to see this.* Turkish student

It was felt that an enduring memory of peace and community would outlast the sojourn and impact on future group relations. This is supported by Gudykunst (1998) who argues that the outcome of cross-cultural contact is the development of a mindful attitude, which equips individuals to build a world community based on civility and tolerance. Similarly, recent papers in the tourism literature have claimed a link between improved world relations and long-stay tourism (e.g. Noy 2003; O'Reilly 2006).

Many students also felt that enhanced employability would result from improved cultural awareness that derived from exposure to a mixed-nationality network of friends:

> *When I go back I'm sure I work in international industry, so I need to know about these countries. These students you know they are not normal students; they are educated people, so they have a clear idea about their countries*. Jordanian student

There was universal awareness that globalisation entailed international cooperation and that internationalised companies would prize the cultural skills that the international study context was instilling. Indeed, this is an association that is widely acknowledged in the sojourner adjustment literature (see Cushner and Karim 2004), and which also appears in the tourist literature (e.g. Hottola 2004; O'Reilly 2006).

The words *open* and *not closed* were used repeatedly to refer to the necessary personality attribute for successful cross-national interaction; the following comment was typical:

> *We are here, all international students, and I think it should be international experience. There is so much to share if you are not too closed in yourself.* Slovenian student

An open mind was seen as the precondition to maximising cultural learning: the conceptual term used by Gudykunst (1983) is cognitive flexibility, defined as the capacity to be mentally flexible in dealing with ambiguity and unfamiliarity. Confrontation with diverse values and practices challenged students' tolerance of deviance and disturbed their preconceptions, and this challenge was welcomed:

> *I can compare the images I have, or the impressions I have of other nationalities, and then see well, 'are they that much different from my personal experience in Brazil, coming from a hot tropical Latin country?' I am learning about myself and I think I will learn what to expect from other people.* Brazilian student

> *Maybe we will realise people are not like what you think before.* Indonesian student

Immersion in a mixed-nationality context allowed existing knowledge to be called into question, as first-hand contact between different cultural groups sat alongside word-of-mouth. The willingness to modify preconceptions is related to the sojourner's category width, which is defined as the extent of consistency in the range of perceptual categories or the degree of discrepancy a person will tolerate (Detweiler 1975; Gudykunst 1998). A narrow categoriser is unaccepting of the idea that a behaviour or situation might have multiple interpretations, whereas the broad categoriser is more open and makes fewer negative inferences. Acceptance of diversity and openness to modification of stereotypes were universally displayed in the first interview, suggesting that all interviewees were broad categorisers, accepting of diversity and moderate deviation.

A universal enthusiasm for cultural learning in early interviews and conversations did *not* however translate into a widespread adoption of a multicultural approach to interaction, which is described by the instigation and maintenance of contact between different nationalities beyond a merely superficial level (Bochner et al.1977). Indeed, there was a clash between self-perception and behaviour, a simultaneous desire and failure to interact cross-culturally. It emerged very quickly, and was confirmed in Interview 2 (three months into the sojourn) that only a handful of exceptional students interacted cross-culturally. Such students spoke of social contact with various nationalities both in and outside the international classroom. Since they were from a range of nationalities and cultures, it was not possible to use cultural dimensions to explain this category of sojourner. Neither could linguistic superiority be cited as the explanation as language ability was variable among these students, who withstood the stress of foreign language use in their determination to achieve cross-cultural contact. The rest of the paper will highlight the common interaction patterns and will offer *emic* (student) and *etic* (theoretical) interpretations for the friendship groups documented in this ethnography.

A divide between East and West

Sitting alongside an appreciation of cultural diversity and the acknowledged advantages of international contact was a simultaneous tendency to gravitate towards same culture members; students spoke of sharing meals outside the university and socialising on the campus in the library or coffee bar. Undermining an expressed desire to mix across nationalities, students alerted the researcher as early as Interview 1 to a divide between the East and the West (these are students' own terms): cross-national interaction was taking place *within* rather than *across* regional/cultural groupings. The following description by a Thai student of her friendship group was typical of all South East Asian students who participated in the research:

> *All of my friends are international. Actually, most are Asians. I have one Thai, Korean, Japanese,*

Malaysian.

As the following comments reveal, a stand-off had emerged that all Asian participants were aware of:

> *You could see that there is a pattern there. European students automatically sit on the European side and this is Asian side.* Malaysian student

> *There are two camps. European students are usually mix with the European students. And we stay together too.* Chinese student

This was attributed to the feelings of comfort and acceptance that obtained from the Asian friendship group:

> *I only mix with Asian students, because I feel more comfortable with them. The Asian is more open for me.* Chinese student

Shared heritage was a further reason offered for the gravitation to same culture members. Arora (2005) states that members of ethnic groups have a comforting sense of shared origins, and believe they are distinctive from other groups in some way. What unified Asian students was their derivation from a particular region of the world, which they referred to as *Asia* or *the East* as often as they mentioned their country, whilst European students were largely referred to as *westerners*, rather than by nationality. Affiliation to the Asian *camp* was also attributed to the mutual care and protection it offered, which all students explained by reference to differences in cultural norms:

> *Europeans always think of themselves first, they think themselves at the centre. But in our culture, I mean the Asians always think about others.* Thai student

Indeed, Hofstede (2001) states that in individualist society people are expected to look after themselves and their immediate family only. In contrast, the emotional and instrumental support that Asian students offered each other is indicative of collectivist society, in which people are socialised into cohesive, protective in-groups that offer a lifetime of security and companionship (Triandis et al. 1988). It was therefore unsurprising that gravitation towards same culture members took place, especially when one considers Hofstede's (2001) claim that it is on the dimension of individualism and collectivism that societies differ the most greatly. Fear of discrimination was a further contributory factor in the formation and maintenance of an Asian friendship group, engendered by the encounter with verbal abuse from European students:

> *I met some people mean to me. It was European, not British. They said very rude things to me, last night and then this morning. I think I will stay here but I cried last night. Very bad. I don't want to see them again.* Taiwanese student

> *I came to the library to use the computers, and I remember clearly that a European student sat next to me, and just said, 'go back home'…In the holidays, I don't have the feeling of being a minority. I feel more comfortable, when the campus is empty. I discovered I feel less comfortable when European students come back.* Chinese student

Minority status was a source of vulnerability whilst European students, the dominant group on campus, were a source of threat: visible distinctiveness aided the detection of difference and increased the fear of attack, which was fuelled by word-of-mouth reports of racial discrimination. It can therefore be construed that the urge to find safety in numbers strengthened group identification. In the model of intergroup conflict put forward by Branscombe and Wann (1994), this features as a common reaction to a fear of

discrimination, as the threatened group acts as a bolster against external attacks.

Recreating the comfort of home

The literature on international student interaction patterns points to a tendency towards ghettoisation (e.g. Bochner et al. 1977; Ward 2001), with self-segregation being the interaction strategy adopted by most students. As well as documenting a trend of *monocultural* interaction, this study also reveals a widespread pattern of segregated *mononational* friendship groups. The following comments are typical:

> *I think in the first week we always together with Indonesian, so all speak a lot of Indonesian. That's not good. We need to practise English more, but we need to be together.*
> Indonesian student

> *Well, you know, people come from the same country, they will stay together. Especially the Chinese students, actually that's not very good.* Chinese student

> *They are very close to each other, they stay with each other, you know the Thai, the Chinese, the Koreans; you always find them together in small groups, always speaking their own language.*
> Jordanian student

Beyond the university setting, most South East Asian students' social activities revolved around the mononational community; the most popular social activity was sharing meals that were jointly prepared by students of the same nationality. Gravitation towards compatriots occurred despite universal acknowledgement of the implicit disadvantages; it seemed that students felt unable to resist the pull towards the reassurance of sameness in a diverse community. Where there were pockets of same nationality members, the phenomenon of mononational interaction could be observed, and it was particularly entrenched in the South East Asian cohort whose urge to form a primary network of mono-national bonds is said to relate to their socialisation in a collectivist culture that enjoys the company of an extended family (Hofstede 1991).

The insider (student) explanation offered for the widespread phenomenon of conational interaction identified the following three factors: linguistic ease, emotional succour and instrumental support. As studies by Kim (1988), Kramsch (1993), Brown (2008a) and Gu et al. (2008) reveal, speaking the native language provided a physical break from the stress of communicating in a foreign language as well as an emotionally comforting reminder of home. The contribution to emotional well-being was equally important; an important force in the gravitation towards compatriots was the assumption of mutual understanding:

> *Sometimes it's more comfortable. You can communicate because you know each other. You know what they think.* Thai student

> *I and my friend stay together. I think there is some reason related to the culture, that's the fact. We know each other better.* Chinese student

Shared national heritage eased communication: a sense of intimacy was created by the assumption of sameness, of known-ness: it can be inferred that exposure to difference drove the urge to find belonging to a group of previously

unknown and disparate individuals. An associated alleviation of homesickness was also important, as the Indonesian student indicated:

> *This is very helpful that I met Indonesian because you know I can speak more intense with them, because maybe we have the same homesick feeling. And because we are from Indonesia so we are more closer. Sometimes we miss our country so if we met another Indonesian it's helpful.*

Home was recaptured through interaction with compatriots, as indicated in the recurrence of the words *family* and *home* to describe the conational group they had formed. Access to practical support in everyday life was the final explanation for the formation of conational groups, as the following typical comments reveal:

> *I can talk to somebody when I have some problem, and they can give some advice. We Chinese students can have to depend on each other, we can share our knowledge, and maybe we will be less alone.* Taiwanese student

> *It's better to stay with people from your home country. Yes. There is very much information I can get. Always they are ready to help me, it feels very comforting.*
> Chinese student

Instrumental support allowed students to feel supported both practically and emotionally: a powerfully reassuring antidote to the stressors involved in transition. According to Wheeler et al. (1989), interdependence is correlated with collectivist culture, in which group needs are prioritised over personal interests. This is reflected in the recurrence of the pronoun *'we'* in interview transcripts, a phenomenon that students themselves commented on, and which Gudykunst (1998) interprets as symbolic of the collectivist's affiliation to the group rather than the individual.

Reaching out to the host community

Despite an avowal to maximise the opportunities for learning about the host culture, all 13 interviewees revealed that contact with local people was limited, if not non-existent. There was a universal equation of the local community with improved host linguistic and cultural competence that is supported in theories of culture learning (see Schild 1962; Kim 1988; Gudykunst 1998; Ward et al. 2001); host national friends were the best source of information about host cultural norms. An absence of host contact carried the negative implication that culture learning could only be fulfilled through observation of local behaviour rather than active engagement with the host, a stage which does not, according to Liu (2001), usually outlast the initial stage of the sojourn. The second negative impact of a lack of host contact was that access was barred to improving conversational skills, which was a source of disappointment:

> *I don't get the chance to communicate that much. I'm sad about that.* Thai student

A lack of host contact was a source of deep disillusionment for students. Inapproachability was one of the commonly cited obstacles to interaction with local people and British students:

We cannot reach them, we don't know how! Taiwanese student

When you approach someone to talk, they look at you as thinking 'what does he want?' I notice that people have their groups of friends and they act as if they wouldn't let anybody into their groups. Brazilian student

Exclusivity and disinterest acted as a powerful deterrent, and provoked a strong reaction:

The British are weird! So cold! They don't want to talk at all. International students don't like the people here. They do not match with their expectation. The British is not friendly; they never mix with us! Sometimes it makes me worry, is it the culture, don't they like me?
Indonesian student

Racism was feared to lie behind the lack of host contact, inferred from the incidents of racial abuse experienced by a large number of students at the hands of British teenagers and drunks:

Ah, the teenagers! I think they quite rude to international people, they shouting, they, what, annoying sometimes. One day I walk around the road, they on bicycle, they shout at me. Very scary. Another time I'm walking in a shop and they come in after me and make a noise like 'ooh'. Because I'm Asian. Many times, when I walk on the road, and shouting from the cars. It's like you're not welcome. Thai student

Suspicion and apprehension became prevalent: even if they had not suffered racial abuse directly, students were disturbed by stories of mistreatment. There was a consequent resentment of their decision to study in the UK, as the following exclamation from a Chinese student reveals:

Why? Why I came here? I paid a lot for my education and I contributed to the economy here. We contribute a lot of money, aren't locals aware of this?

This study highlights the need for research into host attitudes to international education. The common claim that the presence of international visitors can foster cultural awareness and tolerance in the host society was not upheld in this research; instead sections of the local community were portrayed as unfriendly and at times threatening. Research shows that there has been a rise in violent crime against foreign visitors (see Gaine and Lamley 2003; Russell 2006) and against international and Asian students in particular (Bradley 2002; Pai 2006), suggesting a growing antipathy towards the outsider that justified the prevalence of fear felt by students. Racism against international students has been documented in recent studies (see Gu et al. 2008; Brown 2009); however, systematic research is needed so that the level of the 'hidden problem' (Pai 2006) can be gauged.

The end of the journey

Change is at the heart of this section on the evolution in students' attitudes towards other cultures. Asked to reflect on their year away from home, *all* interviewees highlighted a growth in intercultural competence

that carried implications for their future professional and interpersonal relationships. Taylor (1994) argues that the learning process of becoming interculturally competent starts when a sojourner moves to another culture to live for an extended period, as they usually experience a transformation out of a necessity for survival and a need to relieve stress and anxiety. Berry (1994) claims that the sojourner's interaction strategy influences the outcome of the sojourn, yet notwithstanding previous comments about limited interaction across national groups, *all* interviewees spoke extensively in Interview 4 about their increased cultural knowledge. This is simply articulated by the following students:

> *I think I learned to understand: there were things I didn't know which I now know.*
> South African student

> *What I have learned here will stay with me; it has changed me.* Greek student

> *It is an amazing opportunity to learn how different people are; I learned so much.*
> Indian student

> *I feel that I have changed; I know so much more about the world now.*
> Chinese student

This was a surprise to the researcher who expected those who pursued a segregation strategy to complain that they had not exploited the potential of the sojourn to increase their intercultural competence. However, the consensus was that mononational friendships limited but did not preclude cultural learning. Gilroy's (2007) work on ethnic groups in the UK offers an explanation for this phenomenon: Gilroy argues that the term conviviality can be applied to the harmonious co-existence of different ethnic groups which may not interact more than superficially on a daily basis and yet through routine and regular exposure to diversity they acquire tolerance and sensitivity. Thus integration is not the only route to a pluralist society; this is supported by Arora (2005) who defines pluralism as the co-existence, not the integration, of different groups with diverse features. The evidence of this study would appear to support this view, as cross-cultural contact for the majority of students took the form of interactions in and not outside the university context.

Exposure to other cultures led to a growth in tolerance and acceptance of new practices and values: the words *open, open-minded, understand* and *tolerant* were used often to describe how students felt their outlook had changed. Cultural relativism, defined as the recognition that no single culture has the absolute criteria for judging another (Hofstede 1991), was a common outcome, as the following refrains illustrate:

> *I think if I know more about that I will have a more wide mind to accept different things.*
> Taiwanese student

> Love your country, but be open to others' culture, and try to understand them.
> Chinese student

I believe that this multicultural experience teaches us that people are as unique and right in their values, beliefs or behaviours as we ourselves are. Indonesian student

I think now I am more open-minded. South African student

Extended contact with other cultures also led to the development of an internationalised perspective, as voiced enthusiastically by the following students:

I've learned a lot about life, about the world, it's amazing. I see life in a different way now! Brazilian student

I think I have changed; I like to know what's happening around the word, more interested, and I want to know more. I think that will continue, like when I listen to the news, or newspaper I don't only concentrate on what's happening in my country.

South African student

Becoming attuned to world events denotes a multinational frame of reference, which is according to Bochner (1986), a common product of both tourism and international education. It is arguable however that the year-long academic sojourn holds more power than short-stay tourism to effect such a change. Having said that, there is a small but slowly growing body of research into the impact of long-stay tourism on the tourist with which there are many parallels, largely unexplored, with the sojourner adjustment literature.

Cross-cultural contact had not only transformed students into global citizens but the acquisition of culture-specific skills had also enhanced their employability, equipping them to operate in an increasingly globalised working environment. Furthermore, networking with students from a wide range of national and cultural backgrounds, who may go on to assume high status jobs later on in their country was also frequently mentioned, with acquaintance with Chinese students cited as an important advantage in a changing world economy:

You would get to know how they think, how they react, how they do certain things in their countries. You can use this later. And I was thinking, perhaps from a professional point of view, that China is now a big market. Slovenian student

The maintenance of links established by students during their year abroad has not received much research attention; however anecdotal evidence suggests that some relationships are upheld, with known consequences for collaborative work. Indeed, attitudinal change was felt to be irrevocable; it would outlast the sojourn, and would carry implications for future business and interpersonal relationships, its impact extending beyond the individual concerned.

The positive outcomes of the sojourn are queried by Ward et al. (2001), but this study offers evidence of cultural changes that contribute to the formation of a culturally relativist attitude, a non-judgemental mindset that is essential for operating in multicultural society and in multinational business (Hofstede

2001). Similar findings were produced by a recent study of international student interactions in 4 British universities (Gu et al 2008): culture change sat alongside a clear tendency towards segregation among the international students surveyed.

Conclusion

Growing internationalisation of Higher Education means that research attention has recently focused on the interaction patterns of home and international students, and to the power of the international campus to foster intercultural competence in all university students. It is commonly stated that cross-cultural contact breeds intercultural competence; however given the growing empirical evidence of a lack of contact between home and international students and a tendency towards segregated friendship groups among international students themselves, many researchers have called into question the easy equation between the development of intercultural competence and the presence of international students on the university campus. It is to this debate that this paper makes a contribution. This paper shows that a programme peopled predominantly by international students does *not* inevitably provide opportunities for cross-cultural interaction: yet, regardless of the interaction strategy adopted, all interviewees observed, albeit to varying degrees, the cultivation of the skills and qualities associated with intercultural competence. However, the maximisation of such skills and qualities was dependent on the adoption of a multicultural interaction strategy. On an international academic programme, daily cross-cultural contact should ensure that *some* cultural learning takes place and that *some* mindfulness is developed. By the end of the sojourn, students themselves acknowledged that their experience would have been enriched by greater cross-cultural contact, however, and they recognised that they could have tried harder to diversify their friendship groups.

This paper therefore clearly shows that Higher Education Institutions could work harder to foster greater interactions between both the international and home student communities and within the heterogeneous international student population itself. Only then, one might argue, can they describe their campus as truly internationalised: boasting a significant presence of international students is insufficient. It is important then that HEI address both the friendship patterns of their international students and the extent of integration between the host and international student community so that diverse interaction opportunities are maximised. This will ensure that intercultural competence, the desired outcome of the international sojourn, is maximised in both host and visitor. This paper therefore adds its voice to increasing calls by HE practitioners for the development of strategies that can be introduced at central and programme level to address the obstacles to integration that have been found in successive studies.

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