Bournemouth University

**Online Conference – May 4 on The Delta Intercultural Academy www.dialogin.com
Face-to-face Conference - September 28-29 in Konstanz, Germany**

Developing people internationally - approaches and materials

Institutional Context: the concept of the 'internationally aware' student

As one of the UK's new Universities, for many years Bournemouth has been at the forefront of developing professionally-oriented courses. However, whilst these courses have been rightly recognised in the wider professional community as providing students with many of the skills and competences needed at the start of a domestic career, they have not always provided sufficient opportunities for future 'high-fliers', whose careers would feature a significant international dimension. This has been further exacerbated by an institutional academic structure, which, by virtue of being both decentralised and focused on 'niche' degrees, featured no modularity and worked against cross-curricular development.

Until the mid-1990's, the main access to 'cross-cultural capability' education was through foreign language study, by means of the Institution Wide Languages Programme (IWLP). However, given the declining popularity of foreign language study in the UK and the limitations of such study in preparing students effectively for international work experience, it was necessary to identify an alternative means of broadening students' horizons and equipping them with the skills, knowledge and competences to operate confidently and successfully in the global workplace.

As a group of staff involved in teaching on management-oriented programmes, we sought to develop a range of accredited 'cross-cultural capability' modules to enable students to make, at an early stage, informed choices about the nature, level, pace and progression of their future development as potential international managers. This initiative was informed by extensive reading of research and governmental publications, and continues to be so.

Internationalisation at Bournemouth University

As with many other UK Universities in the 1990's, a major thrust of international activity at Bournemouth University was the recruitment of international students, with, in addition, a very small proportion of home students opting for foreign-language study, and even fewer for international mobility. In recent years, however, the University has become increasingly committed to a more integrated and genuinely holistic approach to internationalisation. Indeed, the new Bournemouth University Corporate Strategy (June 2006) states:

"We are committed to fostering a global outlook. To facilitate this, we will encourage internationally significant research; the recruitment of students and staff with experience of a wide range of countries and cultures; the development of opportunities for international engagement for all students and staff; the delivery of a curriculum which prepares for global employability; the establishment of strategically significant international partnerships and active engagement".

Two examples of this approach include extra-curricular activities run by the International Office and the International Programmes Group, such as the English Conversation Club for international students, and all@BU (Access to Language Learning at Bournemouth University), where conversation practice is facilitated by international students for home students and staff. At the same time, the 'Global Perspectives' initiative has raised awareness of the responsibilities of tomorrow's citizens in an increasingly uncertain globalised context.

We believe that as the momentum for change gathers pace across our institution, the curriculum components described below have reached a stage of development in their life cycle as to serve as a model which can be adapted to a wider range of programmes across the University.

What we offer

As can be seen in the table below, modules in 'cross-cultural capability' currently operate on 10 programmes (8 UG and 2 PG).

(*) indicates that the option sits against an option in Languages for Professional Purposes.
'O' indicates that the unit is Optional, 'C' that it is Core.
The figures [5], [7.5] or [10] relate to the number of ECTS credits.

Programme	Level C	Level I	Level H	Masters
BA (Hons) Business Studies	O (*) [5]	O [5]		
BA (Hons) International Business Studies	O (*) [5]	C [5]		
BA (Hons) Business Studies with Languages	O (*) [5]	C [5]		
BA (Hons) Marketing		C [10]		
BA (Hons) Tourism Management	O (*) [5]	O (*) [5]		
BA (Hons) Events Management	C [10]			
BA (Hons) Retail Management	C [5]			
BA (Hons) Finance and Law (Top-Up)			C [10]	
BA (Hons) International Business Communication (Top-Up)			C [10]	
MA International Business Administration				O [7.5]
MA International Marketing Management				O [7.5]

In this paper, for illustrative purposes, we will focus on provision within the Business School, where the first 'cross-cultural capability' modules were introduced 10 years ago. The Business School is home to one of the largest degree programmes in the University, BA (Hons) Business Studies. This programme recognises that at some time in their careers, all students are likely to work in multicultural teams and/or with foreign partners. Its philosophy, therefore, is founded on the notion that being immune to the concept of 'cross-cultural capability' is not an option, and that at least some exposure to it is indispensable to inform students' choices for the future.

The programme has a structure whereby, in the first year, students are required to study either 'International Awareness' or 'Languages for Professional Purposes'. In the latter case, they tend to be individuals with an existing interest in the outside world, whereas the challenge of the first-year module in 'International Awareness' is to awaken a similar interest amongst other students, and to highlight the relevance of 'cross-cultural capability' to their future careers. This model ensures that all students are empowered to make informed choices about the orientation of the rest of their degree and their future professional aspirations. In particular, it may help them to reconsider the type of placement they want to do (and where), enabling them to appreciate that a placement abroad may be a cultural 'eye-opener', even in an English-speaking country.

In the second year, further development of a student's 'cross-cultural capability' becomes an individual choice. Those interested can opt for a module entitled 'International Capability', which focuses on the sorts of practical business interactions which are most likely to suffer from cultural misunderstanding. In the later stages of the degree, further development is provided by modules such as 'International Management', 'Global Responsibility and Sustainable Business Practice' and 'Language Learning Strategies'.

Through the 'Cross-Cultural Business Communication' module, the development of 'cross-cultural capability' is available to final-year students on Top-Up degrees, the majority of whom are from overseas. By choosing to study outside their own borders, they already demonstrate a strong interest in language and cultural issues. The same can be said of students at Masters level, who can access a module in 'Communication for International Management'.

Through the portfolio of modules we have devised, what we seek to develop in students is not a set of 'tips and tricks', or even country-specific information, but a 'culture-general' methodology, which they can apply to unexpected environments in the future.

Contents

The modules in the area of 'cross-cultural capability' seek to enable students to appreciate the linguistic and cultural challenges of operating as international business practitioners in complex situations.

They emphasise the impact of culture on the principles, use and effectiveness of language, suasion and communication skills. Depending on the level (year) of study and number of credits, the modules aim to:

- enable students to develop and practise intrapersonal and interpersonal behaviours, which are known to be pre-requisites for operating successfully internationally;
- enable students to develop a critical appreciation of, and the ability to apply, argument and persuasion for advanced multicultural business interactions;
- develop students' awareness of the advantages and limitations of the use of International English;
- develop students' understanding of cross-cultural theory and its application to a range of international business scenarios;
- equip students with a critical understanding of the impact of cultural and national differences on business protocol, organisational behaviour and management culture.

Similarly, indicative contents vary, but include:

- Functions of language
- Non-verbal communication
- Style, register and idiom
- Channels of communication
- Effective communication and plain English
- Techniques of persuasion
- The future of English

- The international business context
- The effective international manager
- Cultural norms and differences
- Cross-cultural theory
- National identity, perception and stereotyping
- National management cultures and styles
- Negotiation and managing conflict

Assessment

All 'cross-cultural capability' modules are assessed by coursework only, through a range of multi-layered and interactive 'real-life' tasks, the main aim being to enable students to demonstrate the application of theory and methodology in their own perceptions and behaviours. Assignments include both written and verbal, individual and group tasks, and are always based on simulated business situations, thus requiring students to express their knowledge and understanding through appropriate communication strategies.

Examples include:

- ✓ A group presentation, in which students play the role of business consultants / trainers, advising a British audience on how to enter, and conduct everyday business interactions in, a specific foreign market;
- ✓ An online group negotiation, whereby students negotiate 'virtually' with representatives from an (initially undisclosed) 'Eastern' culture, thus requiring them to adapt their persuasion skills and cultural expectations;
- ✓ A 'critical incidents helpdesk', whereby UK students act as mentors to overseas students on placement in the UK, providing advice and guidance on everyday business interactions and dilemmas;
- ✓ A face-to-face negotiation, in which a pair of students must explore and seek to resolve a complex cross-cultural business conflict, by using appropriate communicative and suasive techniques.

Training *versus* teaching: an emerging pedagogy?

The reasons why we are interested in sharing our experiences with participants in the forum and the conference are three-fold. Firstly, we would like to explore the extent to which the teaching of 'cross-cultural capability' should be generic and/or subject (profession)-specific: how much convergence is there between the needs of, for example, students of tourism, marketing and retail management? Secondly, we are keen to exchange views about the potential pitfalls of methodological approaches which, far from dispelling stereotypes, may inadvertently reinforce or otherwise distort them. Thirdly, we would like to compare experiences to assess what differences, if any, exist between 'training' experienced business practitioners and 'teaching' inexperienced future ones. We therefore hope that there will be an opportunity to debate the possible emergence of an emerging 'hybrid' pedagogy in this field.

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