

Enhancing pedagogical knowledge and practice: staff development for and with international partners (0023)

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Introduction

This paper discusses development of HE teacher training for international partners of a large post-92 University which is a leader in the sector for transnational education (15,720 offshore students in 2014/15, heading the 2014/15 list of 'Top 20 providers of offshore Students Collaborative Provision', University of Greenwich, 2016).

This presents us with opportunities, challenges and responsibilities in supporting our international partners and ensuring the quality of programmes and student experience. With the additional potential impact of the TEF, it is crucial that enhancement of teaching and learning for our offshore students is a priority (O'Mahony 2014).

Since 2012 we have been extending our institutional CPD approach to international partners. This development raises questions related to both values and practicalities:

- What are our assumptions about each other's contexts, motivations and expectations?
- How important is deep understanding of those contexts? What are the local educational priorities and drivers?
- What gaps need to be bridged to build enhancement of learning and teaching?
- What are the relationships between UK policy and frameworks and those developed and developing locally?

A central component of the internationalisation of our CPD is the HEA accredited PGCert in HE which, as an online blended programme, now includes international participants studying alongside those in the UK (Alsford 2015). Where the PGCert in HE is a requirement at the University for all new academic staff without a teaching qualification, offering this opportunity to international partners is a new venture, offering the same potential development and enhancement for their staff, albeit as offer not requirement. More recently we are adding other forms of CPD to this offer.

In an international context, O'Mahony says: "*Professional development opportunities can support staff in thinking through best practice from a number of viewpoints.*" (2014: 37). In essence, this is the aim of the PGCertHE which, for international partners, can support development of skills with which to interpret and deliver our programmes, going beyond standardisation and aiming for high quality, enhancement and excellence. Using a blend of online communication tools to enable varying levels of interaction, the programme also models different approaches to learning

design, teaching, learning and assessment, providing a medium through which UK and international participants learn from each other, to reflect on and enhance their practice.

Our online blended international programme is in its fourth iteration (2016-17). This paper presents initial findings from on-going, small-scale and primarily qualitative research into the experience of international participants.

Developing and researching the international PGCert in HE

The programme values diversity of experience and specialisms and emphasises collaboration. In particular, it challenges assumptions about traditional modes of teaching and learning in HE and offers physical and online environments for exploration and discussion of different approaches. The involvement of international partners provides us with deeper insights into pedagogic practices and expectations amongst TNE participants which, in turn, illuminate aspects of our own practice. It adds to the diversity and breadth of the PGCert experience both for the participants and the teaching team. One of the key questions that interests us how far these insights and 'additions' are unique and context-specific.

Technology is clearly a foundational enabler; without it, international delivery of the programme would not be viable. However face-to-face aspects of the programme are also proving crucial to the relationship-building which is a key outcome of this work. Navigating the technical challenges provides a stimulus and milieu for development of effective practice models for distance and blended delivery which can inform our work with UK PGCert participants as well as our wider institutional practice.

Ongoing programme evaluation data

Our research draws on ongoing evaluation data including course committee minutes, evaluation surveys, *ad hoc* feedback and electronic and face to face discussion with key stake-holders.

Participants' feedback on the programme to date has been primarily positive, illustrated here by two indicative examples:

- 90% of 14-15 TNE Participants agreed that the programme had helped improve their teaching (Programme Evaluation survey, June 2015).
- "The response from students and several of my peers who have sat in my classes has been nothing short of revolutionary. This has further encouraged me to continue this journey to truly creating a learning environment where students are set up to succeed." (feedback from a participant in Trinidad, 2015-16)

Current research project data

Through focus group activity participants are asked to identify elements of the programme that reflected Kennedy's models of CPD (2005), and discuss their individual and institutional impact. Initial findings suggest that TNE participants are able to effectively "unpack" the PGCert both through the lens of their own contexts and experiences and via the perspective of CPD efficacy.

Our assumptions about effective pedagogic practice informed our learning design, but such expectations cannot be assumed as shared in international contexts. Participant feedback illustrates some individual boundaries being shifted - for example from transmissive teaching expectations - in ways which have been transformative (Kennedy 2005:246-7). Our experience with UK participants suggests that this is not a purely TNE experience, however we are struck by the openness to change of some of our research participants; one simply said 'I let it go' and other comments include 'Opens the door for change' and 'the outside view is very different'.

We are currently conducting interviews and the analysis of these data along with that from the ongoing focus groups will be central to the conference presentation.

Summary

Our primary research focus is not on comparisons of TNE and UK experience but some interesting comparative insights are emerging and will be discussed. Our focus at this stage is the context and needs of TNE partners (staff and institutions) and evaluation of how well we are responding through the PGCert programme. Key questions emerging from our research include:

- How does our work challenge or change assumptions about TNE?
- What are the CPD needs of our TNE partners and where do our responsibilities lie in meeting these?
- How do our findings map onto discussions in the literature about freedom and control (Woodfield et al., 2009)?
- What aspects of institutional and sector cultures and contexts impact on the programme and experiences of both participants and teaching team?

There is evidence of development and enhancement resulting from participation in the programme for TNE participants comparable to that reported by UK participants. One broad conclusion which clearly emerges is that this work is worthwhile; just as there is a need for greater understanding of the scope of TNE provision (Naidoo 2009) so there is an correlative opportunity to recognise and respond to the demand for continuing enhancement.

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