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Title Learning on the boundary: Developing Dramatic Enquiry for intercultural education

Submitter Dr. Lou Harvey, Mr. Brad McCormick, Ms. Katy Vanden

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Outline

Introduction

This presentation reports on a SRHE Newer Researchers' Prize-funded study piloting an innovative, co-developed, drama-based methodology for researching the intercultural experience and learning of UK HE students. This outline will present the context and methodology, ongoing analysis and preliminary findings.

Context

Internationalised HE is, by definition, based on national boundaries. Internationalised universities inhabit a necessary-and-impossible space: they are inherently dependent on, while simultaneously attempting to transcend, national borders. This tension is reflected in UK HE in the bounded, binary framings of students which remain prevalent - home/international, native/non-native, monolingual/multilingual. These binaries have become simplistic, reified positions of difference which fail to account for students' complex intersectional experiences. International students continue to be positioned as linguistically and culturally deficient (Preece and Martin 2010; Turner 2011) and responsible for cultural adjustment and integration (Ippolito 2007); while there is growing awareness of the intercultural responsibilities of the 'hosts' (Spencer-Oatey et al. 2014), and increasing critical and multilingual perspectives on the international student experience (Sovic and Blythman 2013; Fabricius and Preisler 2015), international students remain broadly positioned as *other*, with their complex subjectivities underexplored (Badwan 2015; Chowdhury and Phan 2014). A corollary of this *othering* is the comparative critical neglect of the *self*, with the intercultural perceptions and experiences of domestic students also under-investigated. Domestic students in the UK are often expected to embrace an 'international' experience for which they are often unprepared (Harrison 2012); may be unaware of or ambivalent towards the benefits of internationalisation (Huddart and Jackson, n.d.); and may demonstrate lower intercultural competence than international students (Herzfeldt 2007). This indicates the vital importance of an inclusive approach to researching and developing students' intercultural learning in UK HE, and an approach which acknowledges the need to work on the self/other boundary to develop mutual responsibility for intercultural communication (Harvey 2016).

Methodology

The project aimed to address these research gaps by developing and piloting a methodology based on Dramatic Enquiry (DE), a participatory, reflective approach to education developed and pioneered by theatre company Cap-a-Pie. Using my Bakhtinian dialogic perspective on language and intercultural learning as a theoretical springboard (Harvey 2016, 2017; Bakhtin 1981), Cap-a-Pie and I created a fictional scenario around a device called 'The Translator', an integrated earpiece and contact lens that would automatically translate languages, dialects, jargon, gesture for the user, so that they would be able to understand anything and everything they saw or heard. We then developed a role and script for Brad to act out this fictional scenario, and to lead participants in the enquiry in a series of facilitated creative activities to explore their responses to it by engaging their own experiences and values. We ran two half-day workshops for University of Leeds students (n = 22) from a range of study levels, disciplines, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Participants were then asked to complete a structured written reflection and were invited to individual or pair interview (n = 10). The complete dataset comprised the script, videos and photographs of the workshops, participants' poems (from one of the workshop activities), workshop observation notes, participants' written reflections, and interview transcripts.

Preliminary analysis and findings

Following Jackson and Mazzei (2012), I 'plugged in' the data to post-structural and neo-materialist theoretical perspectives to explore the concept of the *self/other boundary* which was at the heart of the script; to explore the boundaries between languages, cultures, people, and objects which were so prevalent in the data; and to explore the relationship between these boundaries and learning. These theoretical perspectives entail a relational, entangled approach to the data, which understands boundaries as both necessary and impossible; understands *things* as mutually constituted (Hultman and Lenz Taguchi 2010); and understands the boundaries we draw as having ontological implications (Hekman 2010). The ongoing analysis coheres around the Deleuzian concept of *detritorialisation*, illuminating how these boundaries were productively unsettled and destabilised as part of the dramatic enquiry. The following preliminary findings will be expanded and developed in the coming months.

The Dramatic Enquiry workshops afforded a space for participants to think safely and productively about communication and mis/understanding, and their relation to learning. Participants were heavily reliant on a concept of 'language' tied to ideas of culture, nation and identity. Through the workshops, participants explored a fictional scenario through a variety of communicative and performative modes, and their understandings of language and communication started to become 'detritorialised' (following Deleuze and Guattari 1977) – uncoupled from the concepts to which participants so readily related them. This took place through the embodied and intra-active workshop activities, which generated an immanent intercultural ethics (MacDonald and O'Regan 2013; Frimberger 2016): not an abstract ethics based on essential difference or sameness (related to reified 'cultures', 'nations' etc.), but an

experience of ethics based on embodied and material engagement with an *other*, and which recognises the other qua other. The dramatic scenario also enabled embodied, material, and unfinalised ways of knowing for the participants, which have the potential to unsettle the dominant forms and systems of knowledge privileged in UK HE (Hall and Tandon 2017). I therefore make a claim for DE's *performative onto-epistemological* potential (after Gibson-Graham 2008, and Barad 2007) - its power to bring into existence different ways of knowing-through-being. I posit that it is in this dimension that DE might contribute to a more ethical internationalisation of higher education, one which may meaningfully acknowledge the necessity and impossibility of the boundaries on which it is based, and challenge the reductive and oppressive binary framings to which students are too often subjected.

Conclusion

This is a small-scale study piloting Dramatic Enquiry as a method for researching intercultural learning, and as such my findings can only make claims for its potential. However, preliminary findings indicate that in Dramatic Enquiry, students may find a space in which alternative ways of knowing can be recognised and produced, in which they may analyse and deconstruct disempowering identities, and in which they can engage in 'an experience of ethics' (Tarc 2006: 288) through explicit attention to their material entanglements with others. Future work which builds on this study, with creative modes of inquiry and a performative orientation to knowledge creation, has the potential not only to advance empirical knowledge but to fundamentally question how knowledge is/can be generated, and how different ways of knowing can serve a more ethical internationalisation and a more equitable future.

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