

**Serial number** 0292

**Title** The potential of intercultural reflection for enhancing teaching and internationalising academic development

**Submitter** Prof. Nicola Reimann, Dr. Julie Rattray, Dr. Malcom Murray, Dr. Teti Dragas, Dr. Jamie Thompson, Dr. Miriam Hansen, Dr. Sabine Fabriz, Mr. Julia Mendzheritskaya

## **The potential of intercultural reflection for enhancing teaching and internationalising academic development**

### Background

This paper uses the outcomes of a small-scale practical pilot of a novel approach to reflection on teaching as a starting point to discuss the potential benefits of incorporating an intercultural dimension into reflection. It asks whether intercultural reflection may offer a new perspective on enhancing learning and teaching and an opportunity to internationalise academic development.

Erasmus staff mobility acquainted academic developers from two universities, one in the UK, one in Germany, with reflective methods that offered fruitful alternatives to the ones used in their home institutions. The fact that participants commented on the benefits of reflection and exchange across disciplinary and departmental boundaries suggested that systematically incorporating intercultural dialogue, using technology as a vehicle, might offer additional benefits. This resulted in an initial pilot followed by the development of a wider project (in progress).

### Context and literature review

McAlpine et al. (2004) describe reflection on teaching 'as a process of formative evaluation in which one collects and uses feedback to revise and improve instruction' (p.338). The value of reflection, peer observation, self assessment and feedback for the professional development of higher education teachers and the enhancement of learning and teaching has been repeatedly emphasised (Fendler, Seidel and Johannes, 2013; Kreber, 2013; McAlpine et al., 2006; McAlpine et al., 2004; Kreber and Cranton, 2000). Many academic development courses therefore aim to develop academics as reflective practitioners. However, apart from exceptions such Karm (2010), little is known about the kinds of reflective tasks and activities which participants of academic development courses and academics on the ground engage in. Recent research has stressed the value of peer review and observation for community building (Harper and Nicolson, 2013, McLeod et al., 2013) and of approaches which enable the examination of teaching from multiple perspectives (Kenny et al., 2014; Huxham et al., 2017). Alternatives to conventional classroom observations such as 'lesson study' (Dudley, 2014) and various video-based professional development programmes (Gröschner et al., 2014) are already used in teacher education, but have not had much impact on higher education.

The paper specifically focuses on intercultural dialogue as a way of enhancing problem-solving and critical reflection on teaching. Culture is understood in line with Holliday's (1999) notion of 'small cultures', i.e. that any context that involves cohesive social groupings and activities shapes identity and behaviour. In focusing on the socio-cultural nature of academic disciplines, HE Becher & Trowler (2001) have characterised HE as consisting of 'academic tribes and territories', while Volet (2001) refers to 'cultural-educational contexts' and culture as sharing the meaning and value of specific educational practices 'assumed to be understood and shared by all individuals participating in those activities' (p.60). Jawitz (2008) has shown how departmental cultures shape academic identities and practices in relation to assessment.

In today's globalised world universities employ staff from a wide range of countries, and academics have to be mobile. Not only do they need to teach in contrasting HE environments, they also need to adjust to a diverse, international student body. However, while internationalisation is increasingly addressed in academic development courses, academic development itself tends to focus on national and institutional concerns rather than taking a broader, international perspective. Publications on academic development have only recently started to consider interculturality and if they do, predominantly focus on transnational teaching (e.g. Smith, 2009). There has been some interest in the experience of staff mobility and being an academic in different countries (e.g. Hsieh, 2012, Kreber & Hounsell, 2014), but links have not been made to reflection on teaching. Cultures with particular relevance to this project are disciplinary, departmental, institutional as well as national. By talking and reflecting interculturally, the familiar and taken for granted has to be made explicit and new perspectives have to be considered. In 'Tools for Teaching in an Educationally Mobile World', Carroll (2015) highlights the importance of becoming aware of one's own cultural rules, beliefs and values by making them explicit, and advocates an approach which constantly moves between experience and reflection as well as offering planned interactions with people from different cultures. The approach this paper focuses on therefore emphasises the benefit of perspective taking and interculturality for reflection on teaching.

#### Methodology and findings

The initial small-scale internally funded project focused on piloting the 'Intercultural Reflecting Team' method. This involved a group of academics from both universities linked via videoconferencing to discuss each other's practical teaching problems and identify possible solutions. To evaluate the approach, virtual meetings were recorded and complemented by questionnaire and interview data. Initial analysis suggests that for some participants, the international perspective was crucial, while for others dialogue across disciplines appeared to be more valuable. It also highlighted challenges which the wider project needs to address, e.g. those arising from the use of English as a lingua franca and/or other languages.

The pilot was used to propose a larger project by systematically developing the intercultural and technological dimensions, using a range of reflective methods and involving an additional partner with a different national and institutional infrastructure. Additional methods include 'Intercultural Peer Observation' during which a 1-1 partnership is formed to discuss video-recordings of each other's teaching', and 'Intercultural Teaching Process Recall' which involves self and peer review of excerpts from videos of own teaching as part of a supportive group meeting. The project intends to result in an 'Intercultural Community of Reflective Practice' with participants from a range of countries, institutions and disciplines.

#### Implications

Intercultural reflection on teaching aims to enhance learning and teaching in higher education by exposing academics to alternative approaches and perspectives, and by contributing to the development of global academics. The specific methods developed as part of the project can be employed by a wide range of institutions and academic developers, and the wider project will need to generate further evidence to explore their impact and effectiveness.

#### References

Becher, T., and Trowler, P. (2001) *Academic Tribes and Territory. Intellectual enquiry and the culture of disciplines*. Second edition: Buckingham and Philadelphia: The Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.

Carroll, J. (2015) *Tools for teaching in an Educationally Mobile World*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

Dudley, P. (ed., 2015) *Lesson study: Professional learning for our time*. Oxon and New York: Routledge.

Fendler, J., Seidel, T., and Johannes, C. (2013) 'Wie wirksam sind hochschuldidaktische Workshops? Auswirkungen auf die Lehrkompetenz von Hochschullehrenden'. *Beiträge zur Hochschulforschung*, 35. Jahrgang, 3/2013, available at <http://www.bzh.bayern.de/uploads/media/3-2013-Fendler-Seidel-Johannes.pdf>

Gröschner, A., Seidel, T., Kiemer, K., and Pehmer, A. (2014) 'Through the lens of teacher professional development components: the 'Dialogic Video Cycle' as an innovative program to foster classroom dialogue'. *Professional Development in Education* 41(4), pp. 729-756.

Harper, F., and Nicolson, M. (2013) 'On-line peer observation: its value in teacher professional development, support and well-being'. *International Journal for Academic Development* 18(3), pp.264-275.

Holliday, A. (1999) 'Small cultures'. *Applied Linguistics* 20(2), pp.237-264.

Hsieh, H.-H. (2012) 'Challenges facing Chinese academic staff in a UK university in terms of language, relationships and culture'. *Teaching in Higher Education* 17(4), pp. 371-383.

Kreber, C., and Hounsell, J. (2014) Being an international academic. A phenomenological study of academic migrants adjusting to working and living in Scotland. In Tight, M., and Maadad, N. (eds) *Academic Mobility*. Vol. 11, International Perspectives on Higher Education Research. Emerald Press, pp. 9-33.

Huxham, M., Scoles, J., Green, U., Purves, S., Welsh, Z., and Gray, A. (2017) ' "Observation has set in": comparing students and peers as reviewers of teaching.' *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 42(6), pp. 887-899.

Jawitz, J. (2008) 'Learning to assess in the academic workplace: case study in the Natural Sciences'. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 22(5), pp. 1006-1018.

Karm, M. (2010) 'Reflection tasks in pedagogical training courses'. *International Journal for Academic Development* 15(3), pp.203-214.

K

enny, A., Mitchell, E., Ní Chróinín, D., Vaughan, E., and Murtagh, E. (2014) ' "In their shoes": exploring a modified approach to peer observation of teaching in a university setting'. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* 51(2), pp. 218-229.

Kreber, C. (2013) *Authenticity in and through teaching in higher education: the transformative potential of the scholarship of teaching and learning*. London and New York: Routledge.

Kreber, C., and Cranton, P.A. (2000) 'Exploring the Scholarship of Teaching'. *The Journal of Higher Education* 71(4), pp. 476-495.

McAlpine, L., Weston, C., Timmermans, J., Berthiaume, D., and Fairbank-Roch, G. (2006) 'Zones: reconceptualizing teacher thinking in relation to action'. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(5), pp. 601-615.

McAlpine, L., Weston, C., Berthiaume, D., Fairbank-Roch, G., and Owen, M. (2004) 'Reflection on teaching: types and goals of reflection'. *Educational Research and Evaluation* 10(4), pp.337-363.

McLeod, P., Steinert, Y., Capek, R., Chalk, C., Brawer, J., Ruhe, V., and Barnett, B. (2013) 'Peer review: and effective approach to cultivating lecturing virtuosity'. *Medical Teacher* 35(4), pp. e1046-e1051.

Smith, K. (2009) 'Transnational teaching experiences: an under-explored territory for transformative professional development'. *International Journal for Academic Development* 14(2), pp. 111-122.

Volet, S. (2001) Understanding learning and motivation in context. A multi-dimensional and multi-level cognitive-situative perspective. In Volet, S., and Jarvela, S. (eds.) *Motivation in learning contexts: theoretical advances and methodological implications*. Amsterdam: Pergamon, pp. 57-82.