

Learning Together - Reshaping Higher Education in a Global Age

Editorial Introduction

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The conference Learning Together – Reshaping Higher Education in a Global Age took place at the Institute of Education, University of London, on 22-24 July 2007, organised by the International Student Experience Sub-Committee of the Equal Opportunities Committee. At the start of the conference Yu-Ching Kuo, a PhD student at the Institute of Education, and a member of the conference organising committee, posed a number of questions to participants asking whether there was a ‘correct’ way of learning or engaging with people in global higher education institutions, and whether higher education institutions in a global age should act as centres which disseminate knowledge or transform students into knowledge creators.

The conference aimed to bring together policy makers, students, academic and administrative staff to explore some of the economic, social and political aspects of globalised higher education, particularly seen from the angle of practice in higher education classrooms. The conference organisers were concerned with the urgent and compelling challenges posed to higher education by learning and teaching in a global age, marred by inequalities, but rich in opportunities for dialogue. Their hope was that through an innovative combination of the presentation of research with workshops on curriculum, the student experience and the challenge of higher education pedagogies, the conference would be a significant contribution to how we reshape higher education. More than 140 participants took part, with just under half coming from outside the UK¹. This special issue of *Reflecting Education* is the first of three edited collections bringing together papers first presented at the conference².

While there is widespread agreement that globalisation has impacted on higher education changing profoundly the size, shape and priorities of many universities and affecting important aspects of work relating to teaching, management and the nature of social relationships, much of the writing on global higher education takes as the unit of analysis the university as a whole, giving less attention to forms of practice or on specific courses or in particular kinds of classroom. To fill this gap, this issue of *Reflecting Education* brings together a number of accounts of practice, documenting reflections of staff and students in the light of a discussion of the research literature in the area.

In the papers that follow Valerie Clifford explores the experiences of international students at an Australian university spread across central and offshore campuses, and points to the need for students’ views to be incorporated in the curriculum development process. Siraj Shaikh focuses on the migration of academics and the particular social, cultural and academic impact this has on host institutions. John Hughes et al describe the

implementation of a project to introduce cross-disciplinary sustainability issues into the curriculum, and reflect that while achieving learning outcomes was relatively easy, some of the organisational and resource constraints are more challenging. A similar issue is highlighted in Sarah Holdsworth, Sarah Bekessy & Ian Thomas' account of a project at an Australian University which aimed to embed sustainability principles across the disciplines; while it was easy to pick out successful examples of practice, embedding the change on a long term basis is more challenging. The student experience of global higher education is the central concern of Eileen Carnell and Anne Gold's exploration of the use of reflective statements by a group of international EdD students drawing out what they reveal about students' learning. These statements, they suggest, are a useful way of understanding how students from diverse backgrounds learn, and indicate ways in which their learning can be supported. Phillipa Levy & Bob Petrulis similarly explore students' experiences of learning, in this case undergraduate students and their experiences of inquiry-based learning at a UK university. They conclude that there are similarities as well as differences between UK and international students and that it is important to take account of these in developing appropriate pedagogies. Tania Ramalho & Barbara Beyerbach examine the responses of student teachers to a course on sustainability and globalisation at a US university. The work indicates that ideas about identity, diversity and critical thinking in a global context can successfully be integrated into teacher training course. Finally Kevin McCarron reflects on his experience as stand-up comedian as well as an academic and considers how skills from the former can transfer to the latter in a way that can be beneficial to students and teachers in a globalised context.

As the papers in this special issue make clear, there is no single answer to the question posed by Yu-Ching Kuo, as the forms of practice in different contexts are not uniform. However, the articles also illuminate what important insights about pedagogy emerge when there is no evasion of questions of the problems of sustainability and global inequality.

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¹ A full conference report is available on the Institute of Education website
http://www.ioe.ac.uk/calendar/Cttes/CONFERENCE_REPORT_final.pdf

² A special edition of *London Review of Education* (Vol 7, No 2) will publish a selection of conference papers on the theme of *The international in higher education: dichotomies and diversity* and an edited collection in preparation with Palgrave will publish chapters based on the theme of global higher education and equality. Conference papers are to be found on the conference website at
<http://www.ioe.ac.uk/calendar/Cttes/CONFERENCE/>