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Developing reflective practice with an international student body.

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Title of paper – Developing Reflective Practice with an International Student body.

Title of Stream – Evidence from Practice – developing skills of scholarship and critical reflection among a diverse student body.

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to share the authors' experiences with a masters marketing module where reflective practice has been used with an internationally diverse student body.

The study looked at a module on the MA Global Business degree, which runs in conjunction with international partners in France, Germany, Spain, and Russia. Students come to the UK to study the masters programme from all over the world - Europe, Asia, South America, North America.

A brief literature review highlighted some key themes which were investigated – developing the capacity to reflect (e.g. Barnett, 1995), practicing reflection (e.g. Kolb 1984, and Barnett 1995) and measuring reflection via verbal statements, written reflections and portfolios (Costa and Garmston, 1994).

Project overview

As part of the Higher Education policy in developing PDP's and transferable skills students were asked to reflect on their learning at different points throughout the module. The aim was to introduce reflection, practice reflection and improve reflection as part of the learning experience.

Students were allowed to practice reflection in several different ways

- Peer observation in class
- Individual reflection, which students were then asked to share aloud in class
- Written reflective statements about learning from a team situation

The culmination was the production of a reflective statement about the learning that had taken place as a result of the module in terms of skills development and development of the 'self'.

Research design

A review of the literature around cultural issues in student learning, and use of reflective practice was undertaken. This was further supplemented by group discussion with students, classroom observation and depth interviews.

Additionally, a review of written reflective statements by the students themselves was analysed to assess their contributions to reflective thought.

Main findings

Students were reticent initially, but once the situation had been explained and they had been allowed time to practice in a 'safe' environment, they engaged positively with the experience.

Students appeared to:

- enjoy the experience in the module
- learned more than they thought they would
- realise that they may have developed their transferable skills (aka Crawford's work).

Overseas students who had been studying in the UK for their first degree and had prior experience of reflection did not demonstrate any particular issues, although there is a tendency to 'tick boxes.' i.e. they appeared to see it as a process rather than developmental. Other students from Europe found the concept alien, but nevertheless engaged positively.

Students from Asia found the task particularly daunting, with an overriding tendency to 'write what they thought I wanted to hear', or to describe the process, or to reflect on how wonderful the lecturer was!!

Discussion of implications

Student needs to be in safe environment to encourage them to reflect in a way that reduces the risk of 'loss of face', and where they can be open about their strengths and weaknesses.

There needs to be an understanding of cultural stereotypes in student learning, and a move to develop beyond the stereotypes.

The implications are in support of Chalmers and Fuller (1996) who suggest that lecturers should teach what they want to students to learn and how to learn it, and that this support is critical if students are to become self managed learners (Biggs 2003).

References

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