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Online international collaboration to analyse childcare practices

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MON:Online international collaboration to analyse childcare practices (Angela Bonehill)

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This presentation aims to demonstrate the impact of a collaboration between two universities. Online International Learning (OIL) projects involve online interactions between students studying at a UK university and other international universities, developing further 'intercultural and digital skills' between students and organisations (Villar-Onrubia, Rajpal, 2016). A small amount of students get the opportunity to work or travel abroad as part of their studies, interactions through the internet can be a way forward for widening participation with regards to supporting the intercultural interactions.

The design of this innovative online project was to facilitate a working party of students from Denmark and England to converse and assess the differences of curriculum planning and childcare in the two countries. There is a vast difference in the childcare systems of both countries. This was explored through digital collaboration on a number of platforms.

What was the motivation? To educate the students on the different curriculums, to enable them to analyse, to evaluate, and to give them knowledge of other practices. We began with UK organisations linked to education, we invited guest speakers, we watched videos of different practices, we read studies and papers, we visited children's centres, forest schools, nurseries, and schools, but the learning was passive, the students were not engaged, the students found it difficult to put this into practice or to contextualise their learning. The teachers were the depositors and the students were the depositories (Freire 1974). How could we change the perspective and practice of these new practitioners? We were beginning to get a vision: to expand cognitive horizons about early childhood studies and research beyond the United Kingdom with an interactive project where other students gave their perspective of curriculum and children's development through online collaboration. The students became the teachers.

As a group we began to question…What if we could encourage students to unlearn everything that they have learned about education, to gain a better understanding of natural learning rather than the structured delivery here in the UK? How can we ensure the new practitioner goes out into practice with a new mindset? How can we empower new practitioners to make changes to the existing curriculum but still meet the government frameworks for the county? Why do children not go outside to learn? (Henley 2010)

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angela bonehill
16 January 2017

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Early childhood students in their second-year degree collaborated with their equivalent in Copenhagen studying a contrasting early childhood pedagogy program. This occurred through structured online learning using platforms; a shared Moodle, vlogs and skype.

The students had regular interactions and developed relationships as well as learning about the child care practices and culture of another country, from the initial feedback students and lecturers, developed an understanding of the democratic and spiritual care that pedagogues provide in Denmark and the importance of the assessments and milestones children are expected to reach as per the Early Years Framework in the UK (Gov.uk 2016).

The presentation will report on the experience of networking with academics, students and colleagues, it will demonstrate that digital communications will encourage wider collaboration, mobility and changes in practice for the early years sector.

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Jude Toasland
12:14pm 28 January 2017 **Permalink**

I love the idea of reaching out to other countries and cultures' learning styles and turning the traditional education structure on its head with the students unlearning traditional education practices and teach one another across the cultures. I'm looking forward to the presentation and hear more about the challenges and successes of this project.

Mary Howell
2:00pm 29 January 2017 **Permalink**

Hi Angela, This is a really interesting question that you are trying to answer - how can we change the culture in educationwne the status quo is sometimes all that students have experience of? I really like the idea of this collaborationa dn to widen the cultural excahnge to students who might never go abroad.

What are you plans for evaluating the impact on individuals and whether their attitude and practice has changed? Will this be within this project or will it be something that follows on due to the tight timescale?

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angela bonehill
4:23pm 29 January 2017 <u>Permalink</u>

Thank you Jude and Mary,

I'm really enjoying the project and we will take the students soon to Denmark to meet some of their counterparts. Mary, a good question here, many of our students start on the course with little experience of the sector, therefore they are very impressionable and soak up everything they are told and shown, so it is difficult to measure their starting point, however, they had views and perceptions of their own experiences of the education system in this country and were therefore armed with opinions when they communicated with their counterparts, so in answer to your question, we could use material and recordings at the beginning of the project and then collate at the end and evaluate this.

Pat Townshend
3:35pm 5 February 2017 <u>Permalink</u>

Hi Angela

The internet was made for this type of collaboration! I have only seen these sort of education projects taking place with EU Erasmus funding in the past.

The overwhelming majority of my students become involved in work and study in early years after they have themselves had children. For many it is a significant career change. But at least they have some experience of life with young children and recent contact with the Englsh education system.

Its disappointing to read that you're witnessing so much passive learning in UK. As you know, this is certainly counter to recommendations from early years research over recent decades. Are you able to prepare your students to work alongside others who may not know about the importance of active learning for young children?

I'll be very interested in your presentation. All the best

angela bonehill
6:05pm 5 February 2017 <u>Permalink</u>

Hi Pat,

You are correct, without the internet and particularly platforms where we have visual and audio communication, projects like mine could not exist, this project is also accessing Erasmus funding for the trips to Denmark but it can still take place without it, as there are other projects taking place that are not using the funding at my organisation. This project just needs links to other educational provisions, some effective communication, willing participants and planning.

I have worked with mature students and my part time students are all from the industry, but the fulltime students are from schools and colleges without any practical experience and have the view that early years is playing with children and cuddling babies, which I am sure you would agree as you will have seen this in the past. So similar to your students, who may have chosen a career change my students are new to the sector too.

Yes I agree it is disappointing, and we were surprised when we started teaching them. But the part time students are refreshing, so we just keep pushing the early years values and principles. We have tried to pair up students, putting them into groups and have found that the more confident students do not want to 'carry the weaker students', there is competition in the class to get the best grades and as you know their grades impact on the degree classification. We have noticed a difference in student attitude since the students began their placements, this has brought about some lovely surprises, firstly, where students are making fantastic progress, and secondly, students who are not effective in the classroom are amazing in the school or nursery setting.

Thanks for the feedback

Dr Simon Ball
10:56am 14 February 2017 Permalink

Hi Angela

Please find below the main questions and comments from your live presentation. It's up to you how to answer them, whether you wish to group them, or whether you wish to point to an answer already given above, for example.
Best wishes
Simon

> ▷ I think that OIL is a great idea for expanding horizons
> ▷ I love the idea of the breaking down cultural barriers and challenging stereotypes through this project.
> ▷ Do you think the presence of a staff memeber inhibited or enhanced the student conversation?
> ▷ so is this a major difference between the 2 countries (piggybank concept)?
> ▷ I think the model of vessels being filled persists in education in the UK
> ▷ That's interesting - products of our education culture perhaps?
> ▷ Absolutely, we're fighting hard to try to halt the drip of key stage 1 into the Early Years Foundation Stage
> ▷ cultural assumption that all children have toys??

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angela bonehill
9:10pm 21 February 2017 Permalink

Thank you for all the questions, and for listening to my presentation.

In answer to the 'piggybank' question, this is not something we witnessed in our first trip to Denmark, nor during the interations with pedagogues or the staff throughour the sessions.

In answer to the question on toys, we went to a kindergarten during a tripand htiere was a distinct lack of toys, pictures and resources. Children were outside fo most of the day (5 hours), running around, climbing, singing, dancing wih eachother.

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