

IMPROVING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE THROUGH INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

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THE TEACHING QUALIFICATION IN FURTHER EDUCATION (TQFE)

is a programme of study for Further Education (FE) lecturers who come from a wide range of academic backgrounds, and can opt to study at UG3 or PG level. The programme aims to expand their critical understanding of educational theory and practice.

This poster details the iterative changes to the TQFE in response to student feedback and evidence from student assessments. Over a period of 5 years, the programme has been reformed to make greater use of the MyAberdeen VLE and insights from our own research.

The result is a model which allows for ongoing international collaboration and helps our students develop into critically reflective practitioners (see GTCS standards for FE lecturers).

For the second course, called 'Embracing Change and Innovation in FE', which explores the impact of wider societal change on education systems, students are expected to engage in a critical analysis of a societal or policy change relevant to the subject they teach.

Initially this task involved students being required to read a selection of policy documents and reports and discuss these in groups. Whilst students were often interested in the details of particular policies they found it hard to engage critically with these sources or to think about policy in more abstract terms. Some students described the task as alienating and difficult.



Our approach is underpinned by the theoretical ideas of Communities of Practice (see Lave and Wenger, 1991) and boundary crossing.

We suggest that vocational educators are members of a global vocational education community of practice that has much to offer them in terms of professional development but that they can struggle to connect with this community.

We suggest that an explicit boundary-crossing exercise such as the one we have designed allows our students to reflect on their own context with reference to several others and that the resources we have created to facilitate this are 'boundary objects' (Akkerman and Bakker, 2011).



Students needed help to locate change at the local level within the bigger picture of social, political and educational change and to notice the permeable boundaries of their particular educational contexts. By making deliberate efforts to expose these we hoped, they would start to understand better that policies and initiatives rarely arise as neutral solutions to problems but have ideological underpinnings.

A practical way to do this is to explicitly compare educational contexts in different countries – something that was possible because of ongoing collaborative relationships team members had developed with researchers around the world.



IN 2013, AN ACTIVITY WAS DEVELOPED TO ENABLE A SMALL GROUP OF TQFE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN TO COLLABORATE ONLINE WITH COUNTERPARTS IN FINLAND

(studying at Oulu University of Applied Sciences). Evaluation of this activity using an action research approach provided evidence of the outcomes, processes that worked successfully and challenges for learners (see Stevenson and Cornelius, 2014; Cornelius and Stevenson, forthcoming).

Whilst there were positive and sometimes unexpected outcomes, these were not achieved for all learners. Logistical issues made scaling up the activity to include larger numbers of students on the TQFE programme problematic. The activity was tutor-led with tutors deciding the areas of focus and so some students felt these areas were not as relevant to them.

POSITIVE STUDENT FEEDBACK

noted that the experience helped them to understand their own context in a different light and see the similarities and differences between the Scottish vocational sector and others. Our international collaborators also found the learning experience stimulating.



IN 2018 STUDENTS AGAIN WATCHED VIDEOS MADE IN DIFFERENT INTERNATIONAL CONTEXTS BUT THEN ALSO MET ONLINE FOR A WORKSHOP WHICH THE VIDEO-CREATORS WOULD ALSO ATTEND.

Students worked in groups for the first part of the workshop to formulate questions to ask the external speakers and then there was a whole-class discussion where these questions were answered from multiple perspectives.



Some of the most impactful education and challenges faced by teachers

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