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Improving Inclusion: Short Courses as an Opportunity for Transnational Education

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Introduction

The summer was once a very quiet time on university campuses across Europe, with classrooms empty of teaching and academic staff largely working away from their departments. But over the last 10 years or so large numbers of European universities have looked again at their teaching portfolios and begun to make provision for opening up the campuses in the summer to an additional intake of students. With this change that has extended the academic calendar the time has arrived where summer short courses have become a moment of innovation and experimentation in teaching and learning as well as a transformative opportunity for international education.¹

¹The King's College London summer programming division is an educational business development unit charged with creating space for faculties to innovate. They invite faculties to work with

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This chapter examines how short courses can provide a vehicle for transnational education and, in particular, how they can be applied as an effective channel for improving inclusion. Its argument is in three parts: (1) a discussion of how short-term programming increasingly engages with non-traditional students, (2) an exploration of three case studies to trace how they are breaking new ground in overseas delivery and (3) some consideration of the lessons and good practice that can be learned from these initiatives.

Transnational education cannot be considered conceptionally in isolation from the wider discourse on international education. Education is increasingly bite-size (Taliaferro 2018), both for the domestic market of students in the UK and its international education counterpart. An increasing demand for summer school exchange places of around three weeks can be seen while in-semester exchange numbers for study places of circa twelve weeks are either holding steady or in decline. In the United States of America where there is a long tradition of faculty-led short-term education abroad programmes, universities are reporting that existing programmes are being shortened further. It is also becoming increasingly common for them to be integrated into existing modules that form part of the core semester degree teaching which can render the international education element as concise as barely one week long.

The implications of this are varied. To be effective vehicles for learning, short courses must be choreographed in greater detail and learning approaches must be both creative and active to make it a meaningful experience and this provides a challenge as educators need to think carefully about what realistically can be taught in a short period of time. On the side of opportunity, short courses present possibilities that are not so readily inherent in longer periods of study such as greater accessibility. Penn State University's 2016–17 data shows, for instance, more than twice the higher rate of non-traditional student participation on embedded short-term programmes as opposed to their long-established faculty-led programmes (Brubaker 2018). Given the standalone potential of a short course, when designing the content educators are more at liberty to

them to design short courses and to develop dynamic new teaching techniques. The summer portfolio teaches 2000+ students annually, including some that are under 18 years of age.

tailor courses to the learning and the life needs of the participating cohort. Shorter programmes are easier for participants to accommodate in busy lives as well as more financially affordable. This is especially good news for enabling traditionally-underrepresented students to join in, where their family or work commitments might prevent them from doing so in a longer experience.

A Short Note on the Importance of Diversity in the Context of Transnational Education

A common theme of transnational education is the encounter with the 'other' in the form of a different teaching method or different content. It is about leaving behind habitual ways of experiencing (Vande Berg et al. 2012). It is about confronting and encountering people with different values, ideas and perspectives. Students often describe transnational education and wider international education experiences as transformative. This gives a strong sense of the narrative the students construct themselves about their experience and can be a useful idea to keep in mind when developing these courses especially for groups where this may be their first and only such experience. However, we need to be careful about translating such statements one to one, as transformative in educational sciences has different meanings. In Kolb's model (Kolb 1984) it signifies the transformation from experiential learning, through reflection, into experimentation and practice and it is the beginnings of this which can be seen in the first case study.

In all the examples that follow, the reader is asked to keep in mind Pascarella's definition of diversity: 'interactions with a diverse spectrum of people, ideas, values and perspectives that are different from one's own and challenge one's assumed views of the world' (Pascarella 2006: 521). The participants in the following case studies all comprise students and staff groups who are traditionally under-represented in international education. They are:

- India-based students for whom studying abroad is unlikely for financial and other reasons;
- Disabled students from the UK and elsewhere;
- British students identified as in receipt of Widening Participation status;
- Staff from specialist disability units at King's College London and other universities;
- Staff on research only contracts;
- Staff on teaching only contracts.

Case Studies

Berlin-Based Programme for Widening Participation Students

Diversifying the mobility offer by delivering short-term placements for both study and work abroad opportunities can increase participation. Short-term mobility has value and can also act as a taster for future mobility.

Widening Participation in Outward Student Mobility:

A toolkit to support inclusive approaches

The first of these examples focuses on a programme which was developed for UK students who were studying for degrees as part of the UK government's widening participation scheme. The course was predicated around the idea that it might encourage students to develop personal agency through studying abroad, on this occasion in Berlin. Also, a key focus when designing the course was a belief that by creating short-term options participation could be boosted while simultaneously engineering a starting point – a taster – for more courageous, longer international experiences.

Doris Sommer (Sommer 2014) writes about how communities have sparked civic agency using art as a disruptive force and it is this concept that forms the basis of this carefully choreographed international

education experience. The idea is for participants to develop cultural intelligence and use Berlin and its difficult history, a history synonymous with a moment where individuals had to brace themselves for adversity and against the state, as a source of inspiration and as an example. To participate in the course is to explore a moment where it is okay to feel uncomfortable. It is an opportunity to think about how they might have positioned themselves in such a situation. This reflective moment is something that is also supported through the assessment on this course. Firstly, that the students consider an international dimension to their future that might not have occurred to them otherwise and secondly, that they develop awareness of and confidence to take agency and responsibility in life and to raise their own expectations.

This course was not designed to be a history course. It is rooted firmly in the present, focusing on aspects such as contemporary job market challenges, the start up, entrepreneurial scene and refugee 'welcome culture' or lack thereof. Berlin is not a beautiful place on the surface and the visitor must look closer to really access what the city has to offer: its main resource are its people. Through its people the city reveals itself to the visitor, the temporary local, only over a period time. 'What Makes Berlin's Citizenry So Attractive', one of the key workshops delivered as part of the course in the middle of the week, is often a turning point for participants and it is not until they have experienced it that they are ready to understand and engage in a proper discussion about civil agency in Germany versus that of the United Kingdom. Indeed, as the participants come to realise as they near the end of their Berlin stay, the course is not really about Berlin as they may have originally thought but about themselves, reflected through the prism of a study of Berliners. It therefore follows that the course engineers a range of experiential learning opportunities, centring around encounters and dialogue with very different Berliners and supported by thematic lectures and exercises.

The programme is challenging intellectually, physically and sometimes mentally, but in a measured way. It has its painful moments and asks about the role of guilt to move on, the need for forgiveness to live in Germany, the responsibility of generations born long after an event. It is also demanding in other ways. It requires students not just to think as medics, as geographers, as scientists or literature students. It requires the

courage to do so and the openness to listen; last year a student mentioned that she felt listened to for the first time in her life. It asks of us to think about wider contexts and areas of our life that they might not have thought about, or not have talked about. Are the Stasi headquarters offices boring as the evil is banal? Is evil even the right word? And so it goes on with difficult and often unexpected questions continuing to present themselves as the course weaves its way through the Berlin geography.

In planning the course, it is kept in mind that as short as the course is, there will naturally be only a limited time together with the students and consequently there might be a more complex narrative to these students than can initially be seen. Glimpses of that complexity appear through moments of the course that are insightful in unintended but welcome dimensions such as when a group met with the immigration commissioner of a Berlin borough and the students opened up about their own, sometimes ongoing experiences as migrants and their struggles to obtain the right status for residency, studying and working. This is but one example of where the course encouraged them to reflect on and assess their outlook and perspective in life by virtue of having transplanted them to a new (international) context where a transnational perspective became an inherent dimension to the discussion and to the thought process being applied.

India Summer Schools

The starting point for these makes them a classic version of transnational education. The concept involved taking King's academics over to parts of India to deliver courses in-country in order to enable local students who wanted to access an international education experience to join one of the courses closer to home. The courses covered a wide range of fields from the study of health to classes in the humanities. The participants were mostly undergraduates but also included some high schoolers aged 16 to 18. What was taught year on year would vary based on a number of factors including the availability of academic staff and what subject areas might be a natural fit for degree-seeking students enrolled at the host

institution. Consequently, the portfolio could range from one course to ten courses in any given iteration.

The design of the courses allocated students 45 hours of direct contact time with their academic teacher over two weeks. Classes started not too early in the morning in order to allow those students commuting into the cities from the suburbs to arrive in time to join the classes and to participate fully. Academic content was enriched with study skills sessions, further encouraging critical thinking and group debate as well as soft skills, research approaches and academic writing techniques. The teaching format of the classes was very deliberately curated to make the learning as dynamic as possible so as to best facilitate the students' ability to learn in such a condensed, intensive period. Interactive tutor-student session formats, peer-to-peer learning as well as more familiar lecture settings were combined to great effect. Some courses also used game approaches for parts of the modules to interest and support a wide range of learning styles; their disruption of the classroom setting made its natural formality of as little a hindrance as possible. Following the fortnight of face-to-face learning and teaching, teachers would fly back to London but continue to be available to their students via online media while they completed their final assessments and awaited their grade for the class.

From the outset there was an unequivocal decision to partner with local institutions to deliver the courses and part of the thinking behind that was to build strong, symbiotic relationships with counterparts in India. Part of the institutional intention was to build King's corporate profile and presence in India but do so very visibly, and therefore transparently, through partnerships. Partners included Lady Shri Ram College and Miranda House of the University of Delhi, HR College of Commerce and Economics from the University of Mumbai and Unilever Research and Development and St Johns Research Institute, both in Bangalore. They are strong teaching or research institutions and students from among their ranks were invited to become participants in the classes. Local private companies were also employed to help with ground logistics and to supplement the in-country support from the host institutions for the visiting faculty staff from King's. The academic partnerships were fundamental to the success of the programmes. They helped us to understand how local students were learning and what subjects and skills they

desired. Academic ambitions were seen clearly and, consequently, it began to highlight what King's could offer that might supplement what was being taught as part of their degree. In short, the university became able to add to and enrich their studies in a mutually beneficial, but supplementary way. Pleasingly, the courses were a tremendous success. Over 2000 students took part during the five-year project and this sizeable number gives a strong indication of the level of engagement possible if a transnational education programme like this operates successfully.

Although designed to offer an international education opportunity to local students, two years into the project it was decided to introduce a further dimension to the programmes by enabling a limited number of international students to join the classes as part of King's Study Abroad Programme. Numbers of international students were kept necessarily at deliberately low levels because, fundamentally, the courses were not designed to be a classic study abroad experience. They were not equipped with any supportive programming to facilitate cultural exploration or local familiarisation for first time visitors to India as a short education abroad course would have been. Instead they were kept deliberately devoid of additional programming in order to keep participation costs minimal and to not detract from their core academic purpose enabling local participants to take a King's research-led teaching module. Nor were the host universities accustomed to facilitating study abroad students to join their institutions. Rather, the international students who took part had the understanding that they were going to experience India and would be studying in India on its own terms and that they could explore parts of the culture in their own time with their own cultural agenda.

Lectures held my attention and were very engrossing. I think the course has been very helpful in increasing my knowledge of not only theories of International Relations but also the background of it.

Vishakha Wadhvani

Participant in King's India Summer School in Mumbai

Degree student at Jai Hind College, University of Mumbai

Vishakha Wadhvani's observation that he learned "not only about the theories of international relations but also about the background of it" is

an indication of how different the kind of learning experience was; a fundamental indicator of transnational education. Students were involved in group presentations, researching ideas, synthesising an argument and putting forward a critical thinking essay. It was not a learning tradition with which they or their teachers were familiar as the principal teaching technique was customarily direct instruction. In this partnership-driven transnational education course these students were not just absorbing knowledge but studying through a new way of teaching and learning.

The direct impact of this different way of learning in the context of India is evident in the reflections of another participant, a very dynamic student who did a course on Media, Gender and Culture in Delhi and who later attended King's in London on a scholarship. She described the courses that she did as having connected her to a "network of like-minded individuals and like-minded scholars".

By the time June rolled around, I was rethinking my decision to apply to King's International Summer School in Delhi. It was extremely hot and venturing outside felt like a battle. But I do not exaggerate when I say that the course changed my life. Each day, the readings and discussions opened up my mind to venture into previously uncharted terrains. (...) I have recently presented a paper on consumer capitalist and post-feminist themes in Indian chick lit at a conference in Delhi and it was this course that introduced me to a lot of key ideas and scholars in the field, thus enabling my research. King's International Summer School has connected me to a network of like-minded scholars and has been an enriching experience, both personally and academically.

Fatma Khan

Student on Media, Gender & Culture course,
King's India Summer School in Delhi

During the development of this very course, one of the local college principals questioned the usefulness of offering that particular course, 'Media, Gender and Culture' as she wondered how it connected to the Indian female experience. Here, Fatma Khan's comments show the answer. The course has been a launchpad for her and opened up a perspective as to how she can move her academic career forward. Indeed, from detailed feedback King's has collected over the full five year project

it is apparent that twenty-first century skills, as others have observed in transnational education contexts, are some of the most notable gains from the student perspective, alongside impactful academic content. Creativity, initiative, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication and collaboration were all highlighted by students as primary outcomes of their participation on the course. To this can be added employability skills of networking and negotiation.

A winning strength of these courses was how their content, although sketched on King's campuses, was redrawn to connect each element with India. India provided the case studies for all the applied learning. Also fundamental to their success was the introduction of a dialogic teaching style into the Indian classroom with peer-to-peer learning, something that is still unusual at many Indian institutions, playing a central role. This teaching approach was helpful too in enabling us to understand how to help the students research and write their essays in the manner that King's expects. They were encouraged to form their own critical argument not simply re-tell what faculty had told them in class. To enable this required King's to add to the curriculum a specific session to induct students to critical thinking and the outcome was that all students firmly acquired critical thinking skills during the course.

My experience of teaching in India has been one of personal and professional growth. Having had prior reservations, I now find myself in a position where I can't imagine not returning to teach in this beautiful country. I have enormous admiration for the society of this exciting, flourishing, buzzing and inquisitive nation. I've been thrilled by my students' zest for knowledge, pursuit of cross-cultural links and engagement with topical political and institutional debates. I also find that year after year more and more of the young people taking my courses carry on to study law as a full-time degree.

Dr Diana Bozhilova
Tutor of International Relations module
King's College London

There were also interesting initiatives around the staff development. This was a wonderful experience for staff from King's as well as from Indian partner institutions. Staff made connections and built

relationships in the way academics do through research partnerships and joint professional development workshops. They shared ideas on assessment, quality assurance and teaching techniques. King's recognised that something powerful was happening through these burgeoning collaborations and so decided to fund some staff members from the Indian universities to come on a programme to London to carry out professional development with a wider set of King's colleagues and further their research in London. The impact of these courses on both the personal and the professional development of staff is a strong consideration as plans are made to shape phase two of this project.

Dialogues on Disability

The last of the case studies focused on another group of the student population that to date have had more limited opportunities to have an education abroad experience: disabled students. In 2013 a joint programme was started with the University of Delhi following some initial match-making conversations brokered by the British Council in Delhi. The aim was to create an annual programme which set out to redress the imbalance in opportunity for disabled students to have an education abroad experience. Such was its success in meeting a need that the programme grew over the years to the scale of a network of universities across continents all sending participating students and taking turns to host and contribute to the programme.

As the programme name 'Dialogues on Disability' indicates, a fundamental conceit of the programme's content is the intellectual space to discuss and explore the experiences of disabled students at their respective universities. Guest speakers comprising inspirational figures from the disabled community help to shape the intellectual content which itself is predicated around an aim of finding new ways of facilitating learning for disabled students. In developing the programme, special focus was put on employing responsible methodologies like touch tours that form part of the museum pedagogy canon. The course evolved to contain a strong public policy element too with a natural point of enquiry coming from the students as they discuss disability policies at the different

participating universities. National approaches are very different indeed. In Delhi India, for example, universities were at the start of the programme expected to enrol up to 3% of their student body as disabled students. ‘Dialogues on Disability’ participants discuss such differences at length to identify what works in which context and what does not.

The students on this programme have not only formed lasting friendships across the many boundaries but have also transformed themselves into early-stage practitioners by creating a dynamic, supportive network. The impact of the course was substantial and to an extent anticipated and expected. What was unforeseen was the unexpected internationalisation dynamic that developed between disability professionals from the participating institutions. The contributing staff on this programme were from quite a range of different areas of the universities. As well as those customarily involved in delivering an international education programme, namely education abroad and international office staff, personnel from the library, registry and estate facilities management were also tasked with bringing the course to fruition. The result was that one can clearly trace how this programme has changed the way disability professionals look to embed policies at their universities. As one contributor commented part of the value of this course lies in its transplanting the participants beyond the “habitual ways of experiencing”:

Having the time to spend an extended timeframe during a shared experience away from my usual busy London office environment enabled me to listen in more depth to the experiences of disabled people which has both enhanced my understanding and influenced my approach to embedding inclusion at King’s.

Lorraine Ishmael-Byers, Disability Support and Inclusion, King’s College London

Among international educators at university, one is sometimes not as attuned as one should be to the possibility that some of the professions engaged in shaping university life do not have any level of natural exposure to the international. The kind of unexpected internationalisation for staff above is a reminder that all universities, however developed they think their international agenda may be, probably have further to go

before internationalisation is as embedded a reality as they expect and desire.

Conclusions

Reflecting on short courses as an opportunity for transnational education, it is clear that short courses can be an excellent starting point and help create and deliver meaningful engagement in country with limited, but notably not absent, investment. They can be excellent platforms for building lasting relationships with potential partners for internationalisation and they are also a great tool to understand how to operate in a different context and in different parts of the world.

This beneficial learning is balanced by noticeable risks. The short course market moves very fast and can be volatile. Political landscapes change and inhibit recruitment into the programme because of its location. The return on investment in course development can be surprisingly limited or frequently non-existent. Even the most interesting of courses that works well in one year might be poorly attended the next. The zeitgeist changes.

Sustainability needs to be defined differently for short courses than it does for standard university programmes. It is important to stay flexible, both operationally and financially. It is crucial to build relationships and permit them to flex in responsibilities and contribution over the year-on-year life span of the course. This frequently requires a malleable model with dimensions and caveats that would often be considered unsustainable within the canon. Of course, this built-in elasticity is not only more possible with short courses, their ability to respond to market conditions is an inherent part of their strength and appeal for the universities that build them.

When it comes to finance, the courses that have been discussed in this chapter are not necessarily meant to be revenue-generating initiatives, but education institutions need to see the value overall and understand the financial dimensions to these undertakings for the institutions involved. There is no recipe for success but there are ingredients that make a successful outcome more likely. It is important to be clear with

senior management about the mission of the short courses and to clarify from the outset what level of financial return is likely or indeed is being waived. This financial clarity is also crucial in order to operate on a fair and equal footing with overseas partners and secure their continued buy-in and commitment to the project as a joint initiative. It is imperative to be aware of one's own strengths as an institution operating within a market. It is essential to keep innovating and enshrine a freedom to innovate as part of the process within the programme's development. It is this innovation that feeds into the work of more standard teaching at home which in turn feeds the internationalisation agenda in ways that other forms of interaction hardly achieve.

A final thought is that where possible, there is no reason not to enable short courses to receive validation through standard recognition mechanisms. Some of the students studying on degree programmes in the UK can get their short-term study abroad experience recognised with their Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) and this is a valued addition when they start out in the job market upon graduation.

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