"Classroom of Many Cultures": Educational Design Opportunities in Intercultural Co-creation

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Introduction[1]

One of the most important trends in international education in Australia is the increasing number of outbound students engaged in community-based service learning (CBSL) and work-integrated learning (WIL) placements overseas. Instead of the traditional study abroad model that enrols students in local universities for an academic semester, many of these new types of learning experiences put students in direct contact with other members of the community outside the university, some of whom the students—and even the hosts

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themselves—may not see as educators. These work- and community-related placements are invaluable, but making sure that they live up to their pedagogical potential requires thoughtful design and academic support: How can they be not just powerful life experiences, but also powerful educational ones?

Like many universities, Macquarie University, our home institution, has launched an ambitious programme of overseas placements and projects under its Professional and Community Engagement or PACE programme, especially throughout the Asia-Pacific region (Sachs & Clark, 2016). Many of these placements involved WIL and CBSL, which required ongoing cooperation with the partners to deliver. Over the course of annual review discussions with overseas partners, the project managers and administrators at Macquarie realized that the partners had significant untapped potential as educators. Many of the WIL and CBSL partners were themselves teaching locally, including conducting the kind of reflection activities, leadership training, and public awareness campaigns that were relevant to our students. Some of the partners expressed a desire to be involved more directly in the teaching and reflection activities in which students participated, not simply hosting their visits and providing them the forums in which they gained experience with the local culture.

In our programme design, we realized, we risked unconsciously entrenching a division between "experience" overseas and "reflection" at home in a university environment. Inadvertently, we had offered to students a simplified view of "hosts" and "teachers" as clearly distinct, not helping them to see that they stood much to gain from treating their hosts as educators, especially in CBSL and WIL contexts. Programme design failed to embody the types of collaboration, cross-cultural exchange, and solidarity that we held foremost in our programme principles: We needed to walk the walk of internationalization in our curriculum design as well as we did in student itineraries, and to "listen with respect" to our partners (Meadows, 2013). To avoid creating an extractive dynamic of learning, research and evaluation, the programmes had to be informed by "knowledge-flow theory" (Weerts & Sandmann, 2008, p. 77), and two-way exchange had to be nurtured by embedding knowledge production in a specific environment where it could be applied (see also Roper & Hirth, 2005, p. 3).

The result was "Classroom of Many Cultures," a curriculum design project that employed principles of co-creation to generate a new type of support for students in WIL and CBSL overseas. The co-creation process involved bringing together academics with experience facilitating WIL and international education with local host staff overseas, who also had significant experience receiving students on these sorts of international visits. In all, 11 partner organizations from seven countries provided 25 representatives who participated in the project: Pravah (India), Legal Aid of Cambodia (LAC), Bahay Tuluyan (the Philippines), Restless Development (India), Partners of Community Organisations (PACOS) Trust (Malaysia), KOTO (Know One, Teach One, Vietnam), the Arbitration Council Foundation (Cambodia), Peru's Challenge, University of the South Pacific (Fiji), the Deaf Development Programme (DDP, Cambodia), and the WSD Handa Centre for Human Rights and International Justice together with the AIJI (Asian International Justice Initiative, Cambodia). Participants came together in two international workshops and a number of in-country visits as well as through online collaboration. In addition, the project drew on the insights of returned students, inviting them, too, to participate actively to build the teaching capacity of their home university (Kotzé & Du Plessis, 2003).

The project especially sought to erase the deep divide between home and host in some outbound mobility experiences, where the hosts provide a place to gain experience and support during a sojourn overseas, but all the ostensibly "academic" parts of the programme—curriculum, reflection, and pedagogical tasks—are designed and administered by home country academics. This divide sends the implicit message that one has "experience" overseas, but "teachers" are members of one's own culture, and it runs the risk of imposing Western forms of teaching on situations where they are culturally inappropriate. Ideally, the curriculum support for intercultural learning experiences should be multicultural from the first orientation session in predeparture until the last reflection assignment in re-entry, with the tasks that students are asked to complete embodying globalized priorities and diverse worldviews.

Co-creation as Principle

The term "co-creation" is increasingly but inconsistently used to refer to the collaborative production, in this case, of learning design and educational materials. A wide range of collaborators can be involved, bringing together instructors with students, community partners and representatives of government, non-governmental organizations, and even businesses (Bringle, Clayton, & Price, 2009; Wadsworth, 2010). In international education, broad engagement and consultation are typical with tasks like setting up overseas WIL placements, delivery, and evaluation of these programmes, but the co-creation method directs this collaboration into the intellectual and academic components of their design. That is, this project sought to co-create the lessons and learning design from shared learning objectives, not simply cooperation on the provision of international experiences. In this collaborative process, the goals, priorities, and aspirations of partners other than the academics have greater influence on the overall learning experience, and the conceptual framework that emerges will be guided by contributions from all sides, including the development goals of partner organizations.

Co-creation does not require that all the partners have the same experience or training. The contributors "engage as different but equal partners (different regarding expertize and experiences; equal regarding rights and obligations), producing outcomes that are scientifically sound, applicable, and respond to the needs and rewards structures of all parties" (Brundiers, Wiek, & Redman, 2010, p. 312). This heterogeneity can make the lead up to production slow: Objectives must be carefully negotiated, a work method settled on that is congenial to all the partners, and each party's capacities identified and brought to the table. In our experience, participants—even members of the Macquarie-based team—had vastly different understandings of how curriculum resources might be generated. We found that many of our partners were not confident of their own capacity to contribute, although this reticence decreased when we brought them all to a single place. But once the partners began to share, especially with each other and not just

members of the project team, the result was a fascinating and unpredictable range of insights and observations.

For example, a representative from one of the partner organizations—Catherine Scerri of Bahay Tuluyan in the Philippines—felt that students needed to receive child protection training before participating in her organization's activities, whether or not they worked directly with children. Without that knowledge, the students could not understand the challenges that the organization faced and why child empowerment was such a crucial objective. The unfolding discussion led to a number of activities and profound critical reflection, both on what the concept of "child" meant in different societies, as well as when and how our students should engage with children when overseas. The discussions even touched on how students might choose to photograph themselves with children and the kinds of messages that certain images of children sent. The final module benefited from not only Catherine Scerri's expertize but also significant input from Hanh Hoang of KOTO (Vietnam), as well as university-based academics with expertize in child rights and protection. The materials feature a strength-based approach and stories of resilience from the perspective of the international partners to combat a tendency amongst some students towards paternalism or a "save the world" attitude, especially in relation to children in developing countries. From inception to delivery, this module on children's well-being and empowerment has been a collaboration in which partners' views were central in both the conception and design.

Co-creation Practices

One of the recurring lessons of the project was that co-creation is much easier to commit to in principle than to maintain in practice. The co-creation method employed by the project team was the result of some of the team members' extensive work in feminist, postcolonialist, and Indigenous projects (see Kovach, 2005), but it was also a result of lessons learned over the course of the project. In particular, we found five operating principles essential to the project as it unfolded.

Developing and Maintaining Diverse Relationships

Perhaps more than any other resource, relationships with individuals mattered. Although our administrators might like to describe the university's partnerships as existing between institutions, the reality, we found, was that cross-cultural relationships required person-to-person contact and strong ties between representatives at each organization. We had to make time and opportunities to interact and share with the individuals we sought to engage, and, when personnel at one of the participating organizations changed, we had to re-establish good relationships by building new personal contacts. High turnover in some organizations, including in some universities' international offices, can make this especially difficult.

Recognizing Multiple Knowledges

Initially, we found that some partners hesitated to share, not because they did not have important insights, but because they were not accustomed to the forms in which we shared ideas. We had to broaden out the types of things that might be shared, valuing each other's varied experiences. Even the respect and deference that our collaborators showed to our institutionally recognized forms of knowledge (our degrees and titles) could sometimes impede sharing. Only by fully recognizing what each participant brought could the collaboration be as robust as possible.

Ethics of Reciprocity

Maintaining these relationships and eliciting diverse contributions require searching for ways that all the parties in the relationship can benefit in an "ethics of reciprocity" (Powell & Takayoshi, 2003). We had to move away from a model of "service provider" or treating the overseas partnership as a patron–client link and move towards more mutual sharing. This required not just a change in principle, but also an examination of the daily practices of interaction. As Crabtree (2008)

suggests, "We need more than an ethos of reciprocity as a guide; we need to learn the theories, methods, and on-the-ground strategies that are more likely to *produce* mutuality in process and outcomes" (p. 26). The principle of reciprocity has become crucial to discussions of qualitative research, especially field-based social research (Weems, 2006), so the extension to pedagogical development is not necessarily radical, but relationships in education can default to asymmetry, especially because of power imbalances between institutions; that is, between wealthy Western universities and grassroots non-governmental organizations, for example.

Space for Storytelling

If some of the project team thought that we would move directly into the production of curriculum resources, they were soon disabused of this assumption. Some of the most important lessons that were eventually integrated into the curriculum materials arose out of storytelling when participants were given time to share their experiences. For example, much of the discussion of child well-being and empowerment arose out of quite personal reflections by participants. The benefit was not simply the immediate narrative, but the atmosphere that this sharing of experience produced: One story elicited others, as various participants recognized resonances with things that they had seen in their own sites. What started as abstract topics for elaboration turned into webs of stories that inspired other stories, all precipitating from a variety of important lessons, much more varied, concrete, and well integrated with examples and cases than we would have produced otherwise.

Challenging Linear Methodologies

Sometimes during the project, the team felt like it was returning to the beginning, to the foundational steps, again and again. Whereas some projects might have clear phases in which terms of reference are set early on and each stage builds progressively, we often felt like we were having déjà vu, discussing co-creation principles, for example, for

we-don't-know-how-many times. But each return refined our understanding, and the serendipitous, dynamic nature of how things emerged in discussion was the antidote to a project timeline and objectives set wholly by the team leaders. The less linear the method, the more likely we were to discover unanticipated opportunities brought to the table by one of our collaborators.

Practical Application

In practical terms, these principles arose from problem solving; they were not set at the start. Originally, the team envisioned using a more conventional workflow, with the academics on the team working independently, consulting with the various participants from our host countries and trying to transform teaching resources and concepts created by the partners into teaching materials that could be presented in a format suitable for dissemination. This type of straightforward approach virtually never worked. Without a strong sense of shared vision and personal ties, without moving forward together, the handoff of work back and forth quickly lost momentum.

In contrast, the strongest parts of our process involved face-to-face interaction with the time and willingness to engage all the collaborators on many levels: social, personal, ethical, practical, and even recreationally. The most significant and exciting events were two group meetings with representatives of all participating organizations, including individuals from multiple countries, the first of which was in Sydney and the second in Sabah, Malaysia. In these events, participants got to engage comprehensively with everyone participating, not merely to tell stories and exchange ideas, but also to cook together, swim, laugh, and grow as a small community. For some of our overseas hosts, the opportunity to exchange with representatives of other non-government organizations from diverse backgrounds, not just with the immediate project team, was extremely gratifying. For our host in Malaysia, the opportunity to receive a multinational delegation (with material support from our project) was a chance to show off their remarkable local projects, which increased the respect and admiration of all the groups for each other.

At the first workshop, team members from the university led most activities, even though the topics had been determined through consultation. In retrospect, all the participants agreed that the representatives of the partner organizations should have had more opportunity to lead discussion, a lesson that was put into practice in the second workshop.

After these events, when our relationships once again became virtual, they were charged with the goodwill and energy of the face-to-face encounters, and people wished each other "happy birthday" and exchanged photos, rather than just focusing on the pragmatic tasks they needed to tackle. Probably, the most important resource was the team itself, bound together by shared experiences and respect, which served as the foundation for the creation of the teaching resources.

The Role of Reflection

The entire co-creation process works best when treated as reflective practice (Harvey et al., 2016), with "reflection-in-action" embedded in the curriculum development process. In our project, we continually re-examined the assumptions and structures of our engagement practices (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014; Schön, 1983). Especially because the co-creation method was both emergent and so new to many of the participants, the project team had to continually examine how we were communicating and whether our own methods and concepts had to be revised to embrace new participants. Feedback and reflection, including both informal channels and structured opportunities, were built into an iterative curriculum design process, especially at the collective workshops (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). We provided a range of media for participants to work in, including both silent space for writing and drawing and a video recording space for spontaneous oral discussion; the availability of multiple media was designed to support multiple forms of reflection (Harvey et al., 2016). The integration of evaluation and reflection into the group activities allowed participants to see each other engage in these processes, share input, and gain greater confidence that their contributions were worthwhile and would be attended to carefully.

Integrating reflection and evaluation into the work process itself was crucial, because when the face-to-face workshops were over, participants returned to their regular positions and duties, and continuing to co-create in isolation or through virtual connections proved difficult. The generative success of the workshops and the much slower pace of development when working in isolation highlighted for the project team the degree to which social interaction and exchange had driven the most fertile activities when the team was brought together.

The Products of Co-creation

The co-creative, collaborative pedagogical design process, in our opinion, is especially urgent at the moment because the destinations that Australian students are travelling to are increasingly outside of Europe and North America (see the introduction to this volume). As our students increasingly travel to Asia and Oceania, especially, they encounter cultures in which the foundations of education and activities like reflection may be profoundly different. To impose a narrowly Western intellectual framing on these exchanges is a kind of imperialist hangover in educational format. Co-creation allows the cross-cultural encounter to transform education more deeply, accepting the lessons of exchange and reciprocity into the structure of the sending country's curriculum. Co-creation asks the international encounter to transform not just our students, but also the very way that we teach.

For example, in discussions with partners, we realized that the way we were preparing students going into international WIL and CBSL placements with respect to alcohol consumption needed to change and become more responsive to partner concerns. Because of some bad experience with students drinking excessively on placements, the training our placement support office had been delivering approached the issue with a blanket discouragement to students about drinking. One of our partners pointed out, however, that when visiting Indigenous groups in their country, sharing alcohol, even consuming an extremely small amount, was symbolically significant, a ritual of conviviality and solidarity. In that context, students who refused to drink were,

by implication, refusing hospitality and fellowship. Our partners asked us to teach our students not to adhere to some strict rule, but to be willing to join together with the communities they visited and act appropriately.

Another of our partners, when we discussed issues around alcohol, provided a much more compelling case for restraint than our orientation had previously offered. She pointed out that whilst on their placements with her organization, the students worked with children in primary and secondary schools, children who were impressed by the visitors, especially their educational achievement, and might look to them as role models. Since alcohol abuse was a significant problem in that community, the members of the organization did not want our visiting students to smell of alcohol or be visibly affected by nights out socializing when they met the children in the morning. They did not want to reinforce the idea that alcohol consumption was a necessary or inevitable part of life and would have to exclude our students from activities if their condition suggested excessive drinking was "normal." The fact that the team recorded many of the partners on video talking about issues like this meant that the partners' views could be shown to students in the classroom, coming directly from their own mouths.

A number of the partner and student videos are featured in the module on Workplace Cultures, addressing sources of friction and misunderstanding that arise during placements, especially around the expectations that partners have. Although the project team has designed activities, the videos are an excellent stand-alone resource as they present in our partners' own words how they experience intercultural cooperation with our students.

Two characteristics of the resulting materials are especially crucial: First, they incorporate authentic views of the students from their hosts, thereby provoking greater acuity of our students' own self-reflection (Shalabi, 2013). Sometimes, students, even when they are aware that they are causing conflict or that their actions are not communicating what they seek to, are not able to accurately frame what is happening. Even when they self-critique, they can do so very narrowly from within their own cultures. Providing examples of hosts' perspectives in their own words can encourage students to be more inquisitive and seek to

explore cultural misunderstanding from the other side before acting to "remedy" a problem that they do not yet fully understand.

Second, the resulting materials use forms of teaching that are unfamiliar, arising from pedagogies, guiding images, and concepts that are relevant to our hosts. This sharing of pedagogy means that activities like reflection are less likely to be familiar, Western academic ways of thinking exported to a new context. If our goal is to help our students truly achieve intercultural understanding, doing so on terms and through devices provided by other cultures will challenge them more deeply than familiar methods and ideas transported to a new setting.

For example, many activities devoted to team building in the curriculum are versions of the group activities used by international partners in their own work, including Pravah and Restless Development in working with young people. In our workshops, we found these activities extremely important to establish an atmosphere in which collaboration and listening thrived. Although the activities were new to the research team, they were thoroughly tested and refined in the partners' work, so they worked extremely well from our first use.

The co-creative process ended up producing a much more sophisticated discussion of issues like alcohol consumption, appropriate clothing, and forms of deference for our students, especially as they prepared to sojourn abroad. Instead of the discussion being framed as the university seeking to establish rules in loco parentis—and in some cases inspiring *adversus parentis* resistance—the preparatory materials shifted the discussion to how their actions would be understood in the various locations that the students would visit, including places where practices like dressing informally or alcohol consumption might prove problematic. Students could better see how their personal decisions could not be made in isolation because they were enmeshed in a variety of considerations; in this way, we hope to make them more interculturally sensitive, not by giving them a set formula for performing sensitively, but because we heighten their awareness of other people's perspectives.

The project has made all the resulting teaching materials, including videos, activities and teachers' notes, openly available through a purpose-built website: classroomofmanycultures.net. The form of publication—online Open Education Resources (OER) with Creative

Commons licensing for use—was specifically chosen because the project team sees the co-creation process as essentially open and unfinished. OER practices are more consistent with the ethos of reciprocity and intercultural exchange than other forms of publication (Johnstone, 2005). Ideally, instructors or institutions that make use of the Classroom of Many Cultures elements can, over time, modify and embed them in their own programmes, tailoring the components to suit the specific complexion of their own partnerships. The projects' final report (Downey et al., 2016) specifically includes discussion of the co-creation method so that others might use similar strategies to enrich the dialogue inherent in the materials they use to support international and intercultural learning opportunities.

In all, the curriculum is comprised of six teaching modules, 35 learning activities, 53 videos, and additional materials to support students in predeparture, in-country reflection and post-sojourn educational consolidation. The module themes are: developing reciprocal relationships, team building and group reflection, children's well-being and empowerment, workplace cultures, challenging perspectives, and creating videos for community advocacy. The resources have been tested in a range of classroom settings and include educational videos that share key ideas, techniques, or insights, in addition to partner and student perspectives.

Conclusion

Ultimately, co-creation requires trusting people and relationships over processes and workflow management. To truly practice co-creation is to welcome the unexpected. New ideas and insights are likely to emerge from the engagement with all the partners that may profoundly reset the project agenda and force wholesale revision. In retrospect, we find it hard to see any other way to truly live by the principles of collaboration and intercultural cooperation upon which many of our programmes are founded. Although co-creation can be expensive, time-consuming, and uncertain, it holds out the promise that it can produce genuinely original learning experiences that could not be designed by home country scholars alone.

Co-creation helps us to build a programme with integrity, where values of intercultural collaboration and sharing shape every level of the learning experience and the encounter with diverse people makes a lasting change to the institutions in which we work. We model in our own methods what we hope our students will learn from these international experiences. Our overseas partners can make sure that their priorities and ways of knowing are integrated into the foundation of our joint programmes.

When diverse forms of knowledge and insights from a wide variety of cultures are brought together, they can help to harness students' passion for learning. Better preparation for international experience, preparation that integrates more fully the perspectives of the people that they will work and live amongst, will help to assure that the investment of time and money that the students, our universities, and even our governments are making are most likely to result in profound learning experiences. In this way, students overseas can more easily become social actors whose energies are directed towards social transformation and the creation of a more just global society.

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