



LOST IN TRANSLATION: BUILDING GLOBAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP DELIVERY – BEIJING, CHINA 2009

INTERNATIONALISATION | TEACHING | LEARNING | FASHION



ABSTRACT

A CONTEXT FOR THIS STUDY WILL BE PRESENTED IN A SHORT SECTION ON THE BACKGROUND TO PREVIOUS RESEARCH INTO THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF FASHION PROGRAMMES IN HIGHER EDUCATION (HE) LEVEL IN THE UK, ASIA, AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND UNDERTAKEN BETWEEN 1998 AND 2004.

This will outline main research interests which are internationalisation and teaching and learning. Definitions of internationalisation (Knight, Marginson, and van der Wende) will assist the context of the article and also provide a theoretical underpinning to the discussion.

The focus then moves to the planning, concept and delivery of a creative fashion workshop at the Academy of Arts and Design, Tsinghua University Beijing, delivered in April 2009 by the author. This looks at the differences of approach to both pedagogy and internationalisation in the two universities, together with the challenges of language, translation, and distance.

The evaluation of the workshop forms the basis of a discussion on the value and nature of the workshop as a teaching method, and the added value of international delivery.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper will show how making links with, and the delivery of workshops in international institutions go some way to contributing to internationalisation, and the review reflection and dissemination of the workshops provide substance for discussion and debate around their contribution to the internationalisation of the recipient institution and the pedagogic practice of the facilitator/s.

CONTEXT – BACKGROUND

Internationalisation was selected in 1998 when I had a gut feeling that fashion graduates (in general) were lacking in knowledge of international markets and general international awareness, something that it turned out, that their Antipodean counterparts had in abundance (Jones, 2000). I called this, then, internationalism – not aware myself that other academics and researchers in higher education were already looking at internationalisation, referring to the blurring of conceptual, disciplinary, and geographic borders. Knight (2003), states that the term is not new and has been used in political science and governmental relations for centuries. However, its use first appeared in the HE sector in the early 1980s and since then its meaning within the sector has evolved, embracing such terms as borderless, cross border and transnational education. Knight and de Wit (1997) suggested that internationalisation was responding to the impact of globalisation, and later Knight (1999) suggested that

internationalisation and globalisation are seen as different but dramatically linked concepts; globalisation being the catalyst, while internationalisation the response, albeit in a proactive way. (Knight, 1999 p14). Since then she has proposed a reworked definition of the term:

“Internationalisation at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education.”

Knight, 2003

My first foray into research produced outcomes which showed the results of a pilot study of fashion colleges in the UK, Singapore, South Africa and Australia. The study progressed to investigate students' knowledge of international markets, and attempted to assess the internationality of the student cohort, and also sort the views of staff on how international their programmes were, and in what way they thought internationalism was present in their curriculum.

The research enabled me to understand that many of the international institutions I had selected had a student cohort made up of international students – which greatly affected the outlook of the whole. In addition, students looked towards UK, USA, and European fashion brands for inspiration and aspiration, and many of the staff that taught them, educated in the UK, America or Paris, return to teach with methodologies

and approaches (to teaching and learning, and fashion) which add to the already international learning environment. Finally some of the international institutions in my original 1998 network selected international academics to externally examine their programmes which again, contributed to the internationality of the programme, students, staff and curriculum, encouraging an outward expectation and outlook in their student cohorts.

Many people mistake the term internationalisation to mean the recruitment of international students. Sharrock (2008) suggests that many in UK higher education are unable to see a distinction between “international activities” and internationalisation.

‘The former is about recruiting international students, delivery of courses overseas and linking with international institutions. The latter is the integration of academic, social cultural political and economic factors into teaching, learning and research’.

Sharrock, 2008a

To many people internationalisation means different things, from international activities such as study abroad, international development projects, institutional agreements, or branch campuses – for others it means integrating an international dimension into teaching/learning, research and service functions of higher education, and still others see it as an international profile or brand in order to be competitive both domestically and globally. (Sharrock, 2008).

My research over the years has

focused on the purpose and delivery elements of internationalisation, specific to fashion and textiles to identify how, if at all, our curricula is internationalised.

After spending a period of time collecting and analysing data from many fashion institutions in the UK and overseas, I found that my own practice of teaching was the best method to continue to observe internationality in my, and other institutions in the UK and overseas, and through this my interest in teaching and learning developed in parallel to locating internationalisation in fashion education.

The planning, concept and delivery of the workshop was at Tsinghua University, Academy of Arts and Design which is perceived as being the premiere institution in China for art and design education. It covers the full range of subjects at undergraduate and post graduate level. (Figure 1).

The workshop was planned through e-mail correspondence with the author and YCZ whose role is divided between Head of International Office and Senior Lecturer in Fashion Design at TU AAD Beijing. Our professional relationship had developed through a period of time when the member of staff spent a sabbatical year doing research at the University of East London. The workshop was to be delivered to third year BA Hons Fashion Design students, and was to give them the opportunity to develop their ideas about (fashion) futures through creative practice. This request came from the knowledge that I had developed a new programme (2005) called BA Hons Fashion Futures: Trend Prediction and Forecasting. The programme has a new approach to trend forecasting revolving around a determination to place consumers and the human experience at the heart of its studies.

A presentation was planned which would introduce students to two opposing ideas relating to future forecasting. Gibson (1999) suggests that the future can be detected in the present, if the appropriate methods are employed, contrasting to the philosophy of Edelkoort, which suggests that to discern the future – we have to go back to the past. (Edelkoort 2007, p7) The brief, ‘Fashioning Ephemera: A design futures project’ specified the activities and the workshop had a problem based learning approach, conducted in two parts. Part one asked student groups to collect ephemera which best reflected their own identity, and that of the city of Beijing. Part two required them (individually) to fashion collected ephemera into a (garment) construction, but to work from the collected ephemera images, the outcomes of the group activity. The (garment) constructions were to be exhibited on the final day of the workshop.

The brief was sent electronically to the Academy, along with a list of materials required for day one of the workshop and in good time for students to come prepared.

The aims of the workshop were:

- To introduce a range of visual research skills from observation to ethnography
- To provide an opportunity for students to undertake research to underpin their practice
- To produce a coherent body of visual research
- To identify trends / starting points for the development of design through ephemera

The sessions were spread over two weeks rather than being an intensive block which was not what I had expected and I worried that the

delivery would be too spread out. In fact it allowed the students to develop over the longer period with many students working on the development of their ideas in the afternoon and evening periods in between studio sessions. This delivery differed to workshops given previously and since, which have been short and sharp – delivered over two or three days – which is my preference.

DIFFERENCES OF APPROACH TO PEDAGOGY AND INTERNATIONALISATION

In this section of the paper, I will describe first my own approach to workshop delivery, and second the approach to internationalisation and pedagogy, in the two institutions. It has been a challenge obtaining documented information from TU AAD, so I have had to rely on the students' feedback through the workshop evaluation responses, and my own observations.

PEDAGOGY

Problem based learning is a method widely used in the delivery of fashion textiles because it allows students to engage in real life scenarios in simultaneous small group and individual explorations. After setting the scenario (problem), the teacher acts first as model, thinking aloud with the students, asking meta-cognitive questions, like what is going on here? What do you need to expand upon? coaxing and prompting the students to take on responsibility for the problem, later assuming the role of a colleague in the problem solving team. (Stephen and Gallagher, 1993 Spikell and Aghevli, 1999).

The workshop fits neatly into this model, and is most successful when delivered as a short, intensive period, either inserted into an existing module, or as a completely separate entity – designed to kick start a module, or to present a new way of thinking.

The active rather than the passive nature of the experience enables participation and learning (Spikell and Aghevli, 1999) to all participants. This short and intensive time span can often produce an impressive amount of outcomes – which often act as incentives for further development.

In my workshops, the normal design process is turned up side down, in other words, preparatory research / designing on paper is not allowed. I refer the students to the Old Testament creation ideology, and also Paul Klee who states ‘true creation is a thing born out of nothing’ (Klee, 1953). Students start to create with no preconceptions or planning, which is often difficult and challenging for them, and they often plead to be allowed to make sketches or diagrams.

Pedagogical methods in TUAAD also use experiential learning, and are more didactic in their approach to pedagogy. They do not (according to workshop evaluative questionnaires) engage in group or team work teaching during projects. I have not seen evidence of the omission of design drawing and planning from the design process, but I have observed extensive atelier teaching at both undergraduate and post graduate levels. (Figure 2).

INTERNATIONALISATION

One of the strategic aims of the University of East London (UEL) is ‘to be ‘outwardly engaged in the development of new international markets and collaborative partnerships, to support research and knowledge exchange, to widen participation and to incentivise staff to engage at international level with professional bodies and associations.’ Although it is not our internationalisation strategy, it is relatively inclusive and encouraging in terms of explaining the UEL international approach, which prides itself on the rich diversity reflected across its home and international student body.

The TU AAD website boasts the many international agreements it has with HE institutions globally. Its website states that it attaches great importance to academic exchanges, and

“keeps abreast of the latest foreign thoughts and methodology of fine arts and artistic design.”

<http://www.tsinghuauniversity.edu.cn> accessed 29.08.09

My colleague YCZ has a split role: senior lecturer in fashion design and head of the International Office for the Academy. I was informed that TU AAD’s budget for international professors is “very healthy”, with the teaching and delivery of workshops delivered by invited international academics, lasting from two weeks to, in some cases, up to one semester, spread across academic sessions of all areas in art and design, integrating with and complementing the curricula of undergraduate and postgraduate study, and this corroborates with their website information. Its budget also allows for the normal undertakings of an international office in terms of international market explorations. This supplement to the teaching budget differs from UEL (and most HEIs) where the International Office is separate from Schools. It has a separate budgetary allocation for its business – namely travel to overseas educational fairs, and travel to countries within the international target markets. It does not, like TU AAD, provide the budget to Schools to invite international guest lecturers to supplement, or internationalise the curriculum. This is a fundamental difference between the two institutions.

Distance is high on the list of degrees of difficulty relating to the planning of international workshops. Electronic communication was used to send the workshop brief in advance of my arrival. It stated the materials required for the start of the workshop. However,

students had not received the brief, or collected the materials needed to start the activity. So, to ensure the smooth running of the workshop I had to change my plans at the last minute to facilitate the collection of materials. Atkinson (2008) refers to this as being able to facilitate [these] learning pathways without a clear sense of outcome. I was continually thinking on my feet, not able to foresee the result, only able to advise the approach, process, and scenario (problem). Conversely, there were instances of students working in isolation, experimenting with their ephemera – very often this resulted in impulsive actions such as trying on, as can be seen in figure 3. I believe this to be a substitute for design drawing which as I have mentioned, is not allowed. (Figure 3).

International workshops bring the additional problem of interpretation (of English to the language of the host country). The workshop delivered in Beijing was no exception. YCZ worked alongside me as my interpreter, translating presentations and formative feedback to the workshop group and to individual students. Many of the students however had a good understanding of English, but many needed confirmation in their own language that they had understood. In the group were four Korean students whose command of English was non-existent, so it was very important for their development to have all formative feedback translated. However, I wondered how much they picked up through visual observation and sign language, as some very creative and expressive outcomes came from these girls. Sometimes it is difficult to believe that what you are saying is being faithfully interpreted, however, there is no option, one is often presented with ‘an interpreter’ but for this workshop I was comfortable in the knowledge that YCZ’s understanding

of both the teaching and learning and fashion vocabulary was such that I was getting a faithful translation. It is important to remember to allow enough time for translation, as it tends to slow down the pace of the workshop, as many students need to ‘wait to be seen’ so that next steps can be discussed and supported.

The notion of ‘lost in translation’ is relevant here as there were many instances where I had discussed or advised a student’s progression, to return later to find that the student had gone off at a tangent, or that the development path had not resulted in the desired outcome, causing the student to become disillusioned. Encouragement and formative feedback can help the student incorporate and respond to the up-planned outcome, and therefore select a changed route. Students often refer to this veering away from original plans as ‘going wrong’ or ‘making a mistake’.

“Mistakes demonstrate a form of thinking different from that which would have produced the right answer, and so mistakes can give rise to getting something else right.”

Brookes, 2008

Here, Brookes places a positive interpretation on going wrong, indeed, mistakes are a form of serendipity. When students discover that the unexpected or the un-planned can be the favoured outcome, it is a very valuable learning experience. As teachers, we encourage our students to learn to allow things to happen. This notion of risk taking in art and design education is often associated with creative and individual approaches to learning (Atkinson 2008), and has been the approach that I have adopted in the delivery of international workshops which have explored creative practice. (Figure 4).

Atkinson (2008) refers to the introduction to Paul Klee’s Pedagogical Sketch book, (1958) in which Sybil Maholy-Nagy writes:

‘The word “to teach” derives from the Gothic “taiku-sign” (our word token). It is the mission of the teacher to observe what goes unnoticed by the multitude. She or he is an interpreter of signs.’

Moholy Nagy S, 1958 p8

This has had great resonance with me regarding the reflection and analysis of the workshop in Beijing and indeed in my teaching practice. Whilst Atkinson (2008) illustrates his own interpretations of children’s drawing linked to semiotics, I have chosen to interpret this differently, and that is to understand the ‘multitude’ as the student group, and the ‘unnoticed’ as small sparks of creativity in the work of the student, often not visible to them, therefore exposing the teacher as the interpreter of signs – of creativity – to which she, or he, guides the student. I have found this to be the case in my teaching which has been across many different levels of art and design education.

WORKSHOP EVALUATION

A workshop evaluation questionnaire was distributed at the end of the workshop, which asked the students a range of questions relating to what they had learned and if they would change their approach towards any aspect of their design process, and also asked them to rate the workshop between 1 and 10, 10 being the highest. Out of twenty two students and twenty two responses, two students gave the highest rating, but the majority rated the workshop 7 or 8, (8 responses each). In response to how likely they would be to change their approach to design and creativity, the majority responded yes, or maybe (10 each) with two students stating no. These two

EXCHANGE IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE INTERNATIONALISATION PROCESS, THE EXCHANGE OF KNOWLEDGE, RESEARCH, CULTURE, AND COMMUNICATION IS FUNDAMENTAL TO THE TEACHING OF FASHION AND ART AND DESIGN IN ALL CONTEXTS.

students, although stating that they would not change their approach, gave relatively high ratings – 7 and 8. All the students most likely to change their approach rated the workshop highly, three 7s, three 8s, two 9s and two 10s.

Many of the written responses to the questions were interesting and useful. All except one were written in English. I have extracted some responses to each question:

• **What did you enjoy about the workshop?**

"The very new way of work starting."

"The free atmosphere."

"The concept of ephemera never came up to me. So the way of thinking is fresh for me."

"The ID part helped me to search into myself. I always like this kind of work."

"I've learnt very much. Now I can find a lot of informations from very small things around us and they can apply so many ideas to me and make me pleased."

"Imagination, I know how to combine one kind of material to another one, how to use different materials. How to teamwork and how to communicate with other people."

"The way we collect the objects is interesting and challenge."

"And when we made our design we could totally relax, this is different from the subject that we have learned. We all put our heart in it, so it's very indelible."

• **What have you learnt during the workshop?**

"To explore and to research. I've learned about ephemera and its connection with garments, to observe our environment and culture and also examine ourselves. To extract the essence of object and

to express them on the garment / structure. To develop a new way of designing and researching."

• **How could the workshop improve?**

"Perhaps students should often communicate with each other and share ideas freely. Chinese students are often too shy to ask questions and to be interactive."

"The mind map from the 2D works to the 3D works is not really clear for me."

"If we have more time to prepare the ephemera, I think we will make a better job. I also wish I could have a show (presentation) making us know the whole process before we do it."

Some of these responses were quite poignant and illustrate some of the issues discussed in this paper. Other comments have been helpful in the planning of subsequent workshops. Comments suggesting that team and group work being an approach new to TUAAD, together with the idea of students being involved in the discussion of ideas and work outcomes is interesting, confirming the didactic approach to pedagogy.

After the workshop is over, a new network of enthusiastic students and keen academics has been created, fuelled with the possibilities of future collaborative projects, often, already in the early stages of discussion, multitudes of ideas for possible exchange projects / workshops and collaborative research projects follow. Exchange is an important part of the internationalisation process, the exchange of knowledge, research, culture, and communication is fundamental to the teaching of fashion and art and design in all contexts – be it design, futures forecasting or creativity.

CONCLUSION

This paper has posited the creative workshop as a method of contributing to the internationalisation of the fashion design curriculum, and has used *"Fashioning Ephemera: A design futures project"* delivered at TU AAD as an example.

In various quality assurance audits reporting on internationalisation of the HE curriculum, examples and case studies show how a range of subject disciplines are responding to the debate, through the inclusion of languages, visits and exchanges.

In previous research I wrote that it is possible to set questions relating to international issues into theoretical studies in fashion, which in a small way addressed internationalisation. I also stated that exchanges and overseas study trips could be perceived as a veneer of internationalisation (Jones 2004).

This research has shown that creative workshops of the kind discussed, are more than a veneer; they contribute to internationalisation of not only the student and their programme, and therefore the curriculum of the host institution, but also to the internationalisation of the self. The potential for building global communities through knowledge exchange exists despite many challenges. The next step in this internationalisation exercise, and the ambition of the author, is an international student workshop experience, where academics and students from two institutions work together, interacting alongside each other to reach a shared exhibition goal, with a wide outreach across two international cultures.

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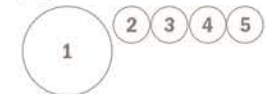
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NOTES

1. Staff Development; 'Teaching Creativity' Japan 05 and 06, Student workshops 'Fashioning Space and Ephemera' Tokyo and Osaka, 08, Beijing 05 and 09, and 'Fashioning a Chair' Tallinn 09.

pages 86-87



1
Fashioning ephemera: Final outcome

2
Group work: Creating identity through ephemera

3
Student impulsively trying on a giant carrier bag

4
Plastic tubing collar

5
Final outcome: Bicycle wheel and label dress