Mobility and interculturality: What's in it for students?

Prue Holmes

The actual importance of international mobility in HEIs
Instituto Politecnico de Viana do Castelo (IPVC)
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The IEREST project (Intercultural Educational Resources for Erasmus
    Students and their Teachers)

http://www.ierest-project.eu/

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Preview

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1. Purpose

Responds to need for preparing students for mobility

- Residence in a foreign country does not of itself produce positive representations of that country (Byram & Zarate 1997; Dervin 2008)
- Developing intercultural sensitivity in students cannot be left to serendipity

Helps teachers and students reflect on issues prior to leaving

Takes an "interculturality" approach

- Questions assumptions and perspectives used in the IC field which are problematic and counter-productive
- Non-essentialist

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Structure of the IEREST Intercultural Path

Before

During

After

Outgoing
Face-to-face module

Autumn 2014
Incoming
Face-to-face module

Returning
Face-to-face module

Autumn 2014
Outgoing
Online module

2. Pre-departure activities
(Module 1)

1. **Perceptions of Self and Other**
2. **Anti-discrimination and racism study circle**
3. **Exploring narrative in intercultural mobility contexts**
4. **Meeting others abroad**

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Module 1 theoretical orientations

a. Multiple identities

The activities teach students how to recognise the subjectivity and instability of worldviews.

b. Power

Students need to know how to identify words, phrases, and discourses that limit the opportunity for some people to enjoy multiplicity.

c. Culture

Students learn to go beyond solid, stereotypical, sometimes negative constructions of culture when discussing their country and other countries.

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Mod 1 learning objectives and learning outcomes

Overarching objectives:

- To help students to examine their own and others' intercultural communication and encounters—through processes of experiential learning, analysis and reflection;

- To reflect on the myths of student mobility, and encourage students to set realistic goals.

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3. While-abroad activities
(Modules 2A & 2B)

1. Intercultural geography
2. Experiencing (interculturality through) volunteering
3. 24h Erasmus life

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Module 2 theoretical orientations

a. Culture shock

The dangers of attributing uncomfortable feelings to diversities => self-awareness

b. Language

Multilingualism; lingua francas (tolerance & accommodation of language errors)

c. Cultural groupings (small cultures)

Refers to the dynamic ongoing group process and the activities and discourse(s) within the group

Mod 2 learning objectives and learning outcomes

Overarching objectives:

- To develop in students an understanding that interculturality in today's world is a complex concept

- To encourage Erasmus students to explore their own autonomy in the world out of the class by inviting them to engage in sustained encounters and reflection of them with local community groups/individuals.

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4. On return activities
(Module 3)

1. One, two, many … Erasmus experiences
2. Bringing interculturality back home
3. Erasmus/mobility beyond the academy

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Module 3 theoretical orientations

a. Small cultures (in/out groups)

Students become aware of the ways in which people orient to particular groups and express group belonging/preferences.

b. Identity formation

e.g., ascribed, personal, intercultural, professional identities.

c. Autoethnography

Students write their own accounts, and analyse those of others (to inform others—in a meaningful way—about their Erasmus experiences)
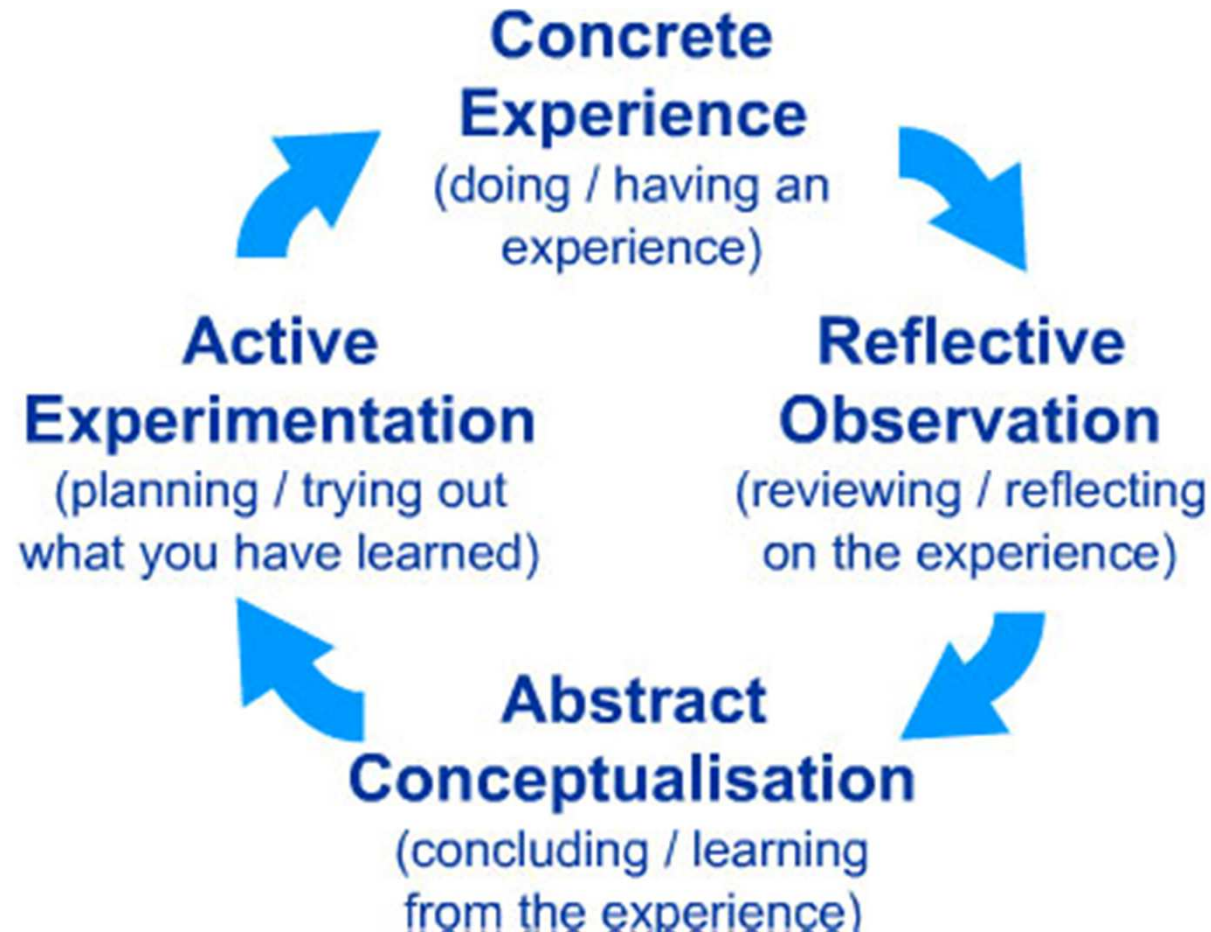
d. Representation

Whatever representation is shared, is also co-constructed with others; it represents "what reality is intersubjectively agreed to be" (Howarth, 2006, p. 8).

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Mod 3 learning objectives and learning outcomes

	Learning objectives	Learning outcomes
1	explore how an Erasmus experience contributes to their personal and professional identity development beyond the academy;	understand the benefits of their sojourn experiences for their personal and professional identity development;
2	understand and appreciate how language and interculturality are empowering resources for engagement with others;	use their language and intercultural skills as empowering resources for engagement with others;
3	become aware that interlocutors are active producers and receivers of meanings (e.g., through the narratives they tell);	monitor how they convey their meanings to others, taking into account that interlocutors are active producers of meanings;
4	develop the ability to name, critically question and explain to others their Erasmus intercultural experiences;	name, critically question and explore ways to explain to others their Erasmus intercultural experiences;
5	develop an awareness of the importance of monitoring their own language to avoid perpetuating culturalist discourses;	use their own language in a way that avoids perpetuating culturalist discourses;
6	develop a sense of responsibility towards future mobile students as recipients of one's narratives.	act upon a sense of responsibility towards future mobile students and reflect on their own Erasmus stories accordingly.

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5. Methodology

The activities draw on Kolb's reflective learning model

Concrete Experience (doing / having an experience)

Reflective Observation (reviewing / reflecting on the experience)

Abstract Conceptualisation (concluding / learning from the experience)

Active Experimentation (planning / trying out what you have learned)

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Structure

Each activity comprises 3-4 tasks; 6-12 hours of classroom work; some extension tasks.

Languages – English; some examples in Italian, Dutch, and can be freely translated

Context – European mobility, but activities can be adapted to other contexts

Methods - texts, videos, ppt (theory), interactive discussions, guided tasks (hand-outs), encounters in the community, reflection on experience

Activities promote critical thinking, co-constructivist perspectives and reinforcement of learning

Activities are interactive, engaging

Assessment

- The activities do not include an assessment dimension, although it is implied in LOs.

- Some guidelines for assessment are given (in certain tasks).

- Some tasks are difficult to assess because behavioural and affective responses may be different across the students in the group.

Teacher guidelines

- Brief guidelines are offered for each activity and related tasks.

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Intercultural geography

Findings from the piloting

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Research questions

How do the IEREST materials:

i) encourage students to think about/understand the concept of interculturality?

ii) promote their intercultural engagement/communication during their stay abroad?

iii) reflect on their own (developing) interculturality?

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Activity 1: Intercultural geography

Students reflect on how their host environment—the city, its neighbourhoods, the university—has been shaped by its history, culture(s), inhabitants and the spaces they occupy

Students are encouraged to compare their own experience and perception of the host environment with those of others (other students, residents)

Activity 1: Tasks

a.   Concrete experience – noticing

   Ss (individually) locate familiar places and routes on a map

b.   Reflective observation – comparing

   Ss compare maps, discuss criteria/reasons for their choices => group map

c.   Abstract conceptualisation – reflecting

   Ss watch a video of the city/region, then discuss the image projected; further exploration of places

d.   Active experimentation – interacting

   Ethnographic fieldwork – students find a local informant to discuss living in the city

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i) Thinking about "interculturality"

Basically the word means communication between different cultures, but in reality it may also mean you need to push yourself to understand other cultures. Sometimes people just want to see the perspective of their own culture and don't want to accept other conflict. Interculturality should encourage both sides to work together. (AL)

How important is the concept of Geography when you go in a new place and how you discover that place in relation with what you are, what you do in that place. … We saw [for] the first time that most of us have a connection with university, college, and this, the centre [of our maps], but also there is the dark part – a place that you don't go. (MB)

A difference between this specific workshop and others is that here are a wide range of topics available for discussion. You can reveal your true feeling, true experience. (LW)

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Interculturality is related to political and social views. Others in the group are more critical and political so I learned a lot; everything I learned on the course can help me solve my everyday problems. (MM)

In [home country] I don't find that we talk about [race] in the same way as it is still connected with a "colonialist" point of view. For us we don't want to speak about this and point out these differences. (MB)

You can understand how your city or your country is viewed from the other side. On the other hand, local people can help us. (MB)

ii) Promoting intercultural engagement (while abroad)

I think I'm an international citizen, but during my stay here there will be some cultural conflict so it may be a way to narrow the gap with the local people … to know the city and the people here. … This course will encourage me to get more involved in the local society. I want to make friends with local people and gain more of an understanding of the culture. (AL)

I wanted to see how my experience and the knowledge I got here [at the workshop] can explain each other … how I can do a better job with the knowledge as I am working as a student ambassador. I can learn things that I need to be a little bit sensitive about. (LW)

We shared more experience and could find in-depth similarities and differences. You [tutor] were able to share many things relating to the local community. (AM)

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The idea of reciprocity …

This course helps us to understand the local people. It would help locals to find out more about people on the outside. So we could have more international students, not only from the EU area but also from other continents. Possibly people from different age groups, for example older or younger people to get some other ideas. We don't need to just understand them; they need to understand us. (AL)

[The tutor] was explaining our experience from the point of view of a local and trying to say "well, this is because….". This helped us because we had a sense of our experiences from a different point of view…. It is really important for us to know why people think in a different way to us, or why do they do some things that we are not aware of. [The course] helped us understand these things and the place we live in, as non-natives. (AM)

iii) Reflecting on their own developing interculturality

This kind of workshop gives you an understanding of different points of view. Even though I know in theory that Durham is international I was shocked that some classes were different to others [in terms of nationalities]. With the movies we saw two totally different videos and then had a long interesting discussion. It wasn't just the videos that were different, but also our impression of them. The reflection on things that we live every day is very important, not just because we are abroad, but in general, in our lives. (MB)

It is the first time I could share my experience in this type of environment. Perhaps I have spoken with my friends or colleagues but it is not the same. Here we could express and analyse everything we discussed. … we shared more personal experiences. It was a very open class and we had the opportunity to share. (AM)

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I think the most important thing was to understand the culture here, as we did last week from watching the video and looking at different perspective of the city. [After being here 2 years] I am still experiencing some cultural conflicts, even now. I don't know how to make friends with local people, or maybe we have different definitions of friends. For example, maybe English people call a lot of other people "friend", but in Asia if I call you a friend it means we have a closer relationship, more than just a classmate. (AL).

Conclusions

Students developed understandings of the concept of "interculturality" in three ways:

 i) they moved beyond their own perspectives to see those of others (essentialising);

ii) meeting others facilitated sharing experiences, finding similarities as well as differences (stereotyping);

iii) reciprocal learning resulted in their understanding of their own experiences from a different point of view, and concurrently, helping local people to understand who they are (developing interculturality/ICC).

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Intercultural preparation and education are important in

- encouraging students to learn to explore the experience of otherising and being otherised (Byram & Dervin, 2008; Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2015)

- developing students' creative responses, resilience and responsible citizenship (solidarity in the face of injustices)

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"Students who go abroad still discover their own image in the eyes of their hosts, and sometimes this image is to them, in various ways outrageous. They still encounter indifference to the realities of their past lives, and they still feel compelled to explain, as best they can. They still find themselves assigned identities, and even names, that they did not expect and would not willingly choose." (Kinginger, 2015, p. 7)

"It is incumbent upon educators to develop explicit pedagogical strategies to assist students in developing awareness of their identity-related challenges involved in language learning." (Kinginger, 2015, p. 13)

$\Rightarrow$ … and to develop awareness of interculturality in intercultural encounters.

Kinginger, C. (2015). Student mobility and identity-related language learning. *Intercultural Education, 26*(1), 6-15.

Thank you
p.m.holmes@durham.ac.uk

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**Holmes, P., Bavieri, L., Ganassin, S., & Murphy, J. (2016, forthcoming). Interculturality and the study abroad experience:
Mobile students' learning about self and other. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 16*(1).**

Final symposium of IEREST project

"Mobile students' intercultural learning: Exploring forms of assessment", University of Bologna, 23rd September, 2015

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