

Teaching across Cultures: Issues, Strategies and Actions

Tracy Zou and Sonia Cheung

“... cultural diversity in the classroom is a ‘double-edged sword’¹. ”

Introduction

The classroom today becomes more and more culturally diversified due to the globalisation of the higher education sector and the increasing student mobility. The high level of diversity, on the one hand, may create unprecedented opportunities for student learning. Frequent interactions between international and domestic students could potentially facilitate the development of cognitive skills, communication skills, and cultural awareness². On the other hand, the diversity can generate tensions and uneasiness for both teachers and students. Cultural diversity in the classroom therefore needs to be carefully managed.

This briefing discusses the key issues of teaching across cultures and introduces five principles regarding how to transform cultural diversity into valuable learning opportunities. It also draws on the insights obtained from informal interviews with thirteen teachers from the University of Hong Kong (HKU) about their experiences of teaching culturally diversified classes. The teachers involved were teaching at least one Common Core course when they joined the study. The Common Core Curriculum is designed to provide broad and intercultural experiences for HKU undergraduate students³. Common Core courses are open to undergraduates of all majors, resulting in classrooms with over 120 students from different backgrounds in many courses.

What Makes it Challenging to Teach across Cultures?

Cultural diversity embraces not only the cultures from different world civilisations across different societies but also cultures or subcultures within a society, which could originate from different ethnicities, religions, classes, genders, generations, religions, living conditions, and sexual orientations⁴. Cultural diversity among students has a significant impact on teaching and learning. A number of examples and scenarios are shown below.

Differences in Expectations of the Role

Regarding the role of teachers and students in the classroom, Zhao and Bourne⁵ describe a scenario that vividly reflects the different expectations between a British teacher and a Chinese student (see Figure 1). Their study was situated in a Master class in UK with non-local students from China. Gaps in expectations of roles can also be found between students from different cultures, which often influence their collaboration and groupwork.

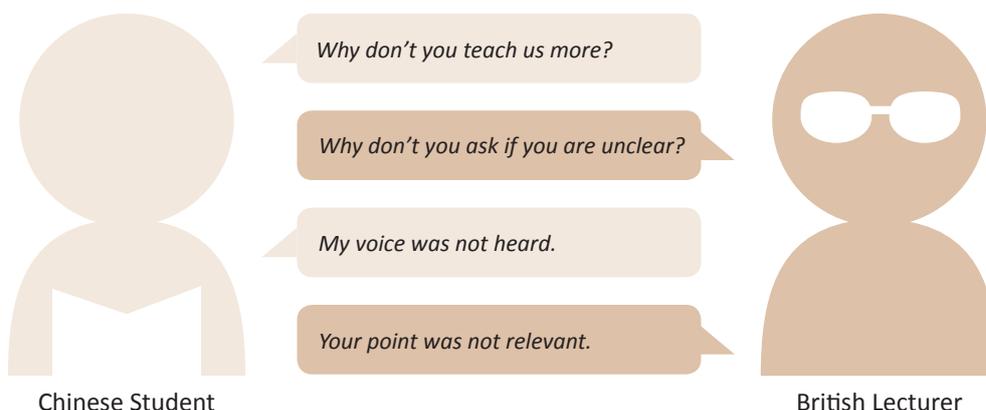


Figure 1. Gaps in expectations (see Note 5)

Language Barriers

Language can be a potential barrier to teaching across cultures. The use of certain expressions such as idioms and slangs by local teachers and students could be unfamiliar to international students and thus creates misunderstanding⁶. The accent and use of different expressions of international students could also negatively affect their interactions with local students⁷. In addition, the language issues of some international students are often likely to result in other study problems, for example, difficulties in writing essays⁸.

Different Social Norms

Students from different societies have different social norms, which could lead to different behaviours in the classroom. Failures in acknowledging these differences might cause misunderstanding about the performance of students. Chanock argues that students from Confucian-heritage cultures often restrain from challenging the authority⁹. For example, they are less likely to openly criticise books or journal articles which they perceive as wisdom from authorities. Teachers from other cultures may regard these manners as lacking of engagement or originality.

Strategies for Teaching across Cultures

Various good practices of teaching across cultures are recommended in the literature. For example,

- Six principles outlined by Leask and Carroll¹⁰: focusing on students as learners; respecting and adjusting for diversity; providing context-specific information and support; enabling meaningful intercultural dialogue and engagement; being adaptable, flexible and responsive to evidence; and preparing students for life in a globalised world.
- The development of intercultural perspectives emphasised by Arkoudis¹¹: encouraging effective communication with students from diverse cultural backgrounds; and developing students' skills to be able to work at any places in the world.
- Characteristics of cultural responsive teachers defined by Jabbar and Hardaker¹²: acknowledging multiple perspectives; showing an affirmative attitude towards diversity; acting as an agent of changes; promoting learners' knowledge construction; trying to understand students' lives; and building on students' existing understanding.

With different terminologies, these good practices all promote a student-centred learning environment and intercultural learning opportunities. Generally there are five common principles for teaching across cultures. For each principle, the rationale is explained, the recommended actions are listed, and the practical examples that we found at HKU or elsewhere are discussed.

Principle 1:

Accommodating and Respecting Diversity

Culturally diversified classrooms have the potential to offer unprecedented opportunities for both teachers and students to develop intercultural competence, which needs to be based on a sound understanding of at least two cultures, including one's own¹³. It is the teachers' responsibility to create an inclusive environment that accommodates diversity and exposes all students to multiple angles and alternative worldviews¹⁴. Recommended actions include:

- Making an effort to understand all students' cultural and educational backgrounds and prior learning experiences
- Inviting students to share their life and work experiences as inputs for classroom discussions and possible learning resources
- Helping students see and appreciate multiple perspectives
- Encouraging students to challenge established worldviews and explore alternatives

BOX 1

Examples of accommodating and respecting diversity

- **A student profile survey** about students' background and their prior understanding was administered to all students in the first class in one Common Core Course at HKU. The results provided a better understanding of students' perceptions and informed their prior knowledge on the topic.
- **Students' sharing of their thoughts and feelings about certain practices** was encouraged in a number of Common Core Courses. In one course, students' sharing of thoughts and feelings was used as subsequent discussion points. In another course, students were given sufficient time to think about the topic during the tutorial, for example, a 10-minute self-reflection, and then invited to share their thoughts in a small group.



Principle 2: Providing Clear Instructions and Specific Support

One challenge of teaching across cultures, as illustrated by Figure 1, is related to the different expectations of teachers and students of each other's role. Providing clear instructions and specific support can make the expectations more transparent so as to reduce ambiguity. Teachers may consider repeating key points and asking students to indicate from time to time if they are following or have any questions about the instructions¹⁵. Recommended actions include:

- Highlighting important points and making them readily accessible (e.g., through learning management systems)
- Offering specific support to students according to their needs and experiences
- Clarifying expectations, intended learning outcomes, and criteria of assessment
- Providing exemplars and encouraging students to raise questions about the exemplars.

BOX 2 Examples of providing clear instructions and specific support

- **Providing clear instructions and early support to students with fewer essay writing experiences.** In one Common Core course at HKU, the teachers noticed that students had different prior experiences regarding essay writing. They gave students clear instructions on the main goals with essential components of the assignment and offered guidance regarding how to formulate and articulate arguments.
- **Scaffolding critical thinking skills for students with a tendency to conform to the authority.** In one Common Core course at HKU, the teacher tried to help students overcome the tendency to conform to authority by giving examples of how established viewpoints might be challenged. The teacher showed the process of analysing existing solutions to a science problem and encouraged students to further think about why some science problems still remained unsolved.

Principle 3: Facilitating Meaningful Intercultural Interaction

In many classrooms, it is not uncommon to see 'international sticking together', meaning that international students tend to group with other international students for discussions and assignments¹⁶. The lack of meaningful interactions between international and local students could severely limit the benefits of culturally diversified classrooms. An effective way is 'to engage international students with domestic students through formal tasks around an internationalised curriculum'¹⁷. Such opportunities can be created within classroom through groupwork tasks and outside classroom through assignments or co-curricular activities. Recommended actions include:

- Designing meaningful intercultural group tasks to which students from different cultural backgrounds can contribute their unique perspectives
- Communicating clearly to students the purpose of the intercultural group tasks and providing guidance in effective groupwork processes
- Paying attention to students' level of involvement in intercultural groupwork and providing feedback during the processes
- Assessing both groupwork processes and outcomes

BOX 3 Examples of facilitating meaningful intercultural interaction

- **Group-based game outside of classroom** was implemented in one Common Core course related to history at HKU. The game was based on scavenger hunt, facilitated by an interactive, automated online programme. The excitement and challenge of the game taking place outside the classroom effectively broke down boundaries between students from different cultural backgrounds.
- **A comparative cultural study requiring international and local students to work collaboratively** was implemented in a compulsory culture course for international students in Hong Kong Institute of Education (now the Education University of Hong Kong). Students were grouped in pairs or small groups with mixed cultural backgrounds to examine a local cultural issue. The group tasks involved studying local artefacts and conducting field-based research (see Note 17).

Principle 4: **Developing Global Citizenship**

Teaching across cultures is also concerned with preparing students to compete globally. This mission not only involves developing competent professionals that are able to work in a culturally diversified environment and with people from different backgrounds, but also means preparing students to be ethical and responsible citizens¹⁸. Haigh¹⁹ uses 'education for global citizenship' to describe the notion and emphasises that students should learn to respect the rights of their own and others and accept their personal responsibilities for the welfare for all. Providing students with opportunities to connect scholarship with the community is found to be beneficial in developing global citizenship²⁰. Recommended actions include:

- Developing students' understanding of the requirements of professional practice and citizenship
- Presenting students with global challenges and engaging them to discuss how these challenges are interrelated and will impact on their professional and personal lives
- Providing students with opportunities to interact with the local community and encouraging them to care about, and contribute to the community
- Developing students a sense of personal responsibilities to the public

BOX 4 **Examples of developing global citizenship**

- **Essay assignments that encourage critical reflection on one's discipline and profession.** In one of the Common Core courses at HKU, students were encouraged to approach the topic of renewable energy from their disciplinary perspective. Through the assignment, students reflected on how their future profession might affect and be affected by the prospect of renewable energy.
- **Purposeful and culturally grounded overseas learning programmes.** A month-long study abroad programme entitled 'People, Culture, and the Environment of Southern Africa' was designed to develop global citizenship. The programme enabled US and South African students to explore the relationship between physical science and socio-cultural phenomena. Students appreciated the opportunity to solve problems collaboratively with the local community and developed a better sense of global citizenship and social responsibilities through the process (see Note 20).

Principle 5: **Promoting Critical Thinking and Deep Inquiry**

To incorporate multiple perspectives and cultures into teaching means being able to see things from an intellectual tradition and also being able to critique it. In other words, we should promote among our students the abilities to think critically and engage in deep inquiry with others²¹. Such abilities will enable students to make informed judgement and decision while being exposed to multiple cultures and perspectives. That is why some scholars believe that critical thinking is one of the most important competencies in a globalised world^{22,23}. Critical thinking and inquiry skills are regarded as a set of thinking skills that one can systematically apply to analysing an issue. There is also emerging literature that suggests critical thinkers in a globalised world must also be flexible and versatile to see and embrace all kinds of differences²⁴. Recommended actions include:

- Acknowledging different interpretations and traditions of critical thinking and deep inquiry
- Explaining the meaning of critical thinking and inquiry skills required in the discipline with examples
- Encouraging students to explore alternatives and challenge existing solutions
- Designing diversified assessment methods and providing feedback during different stages

BOX 5 **Examples of promoting critical thinking and deep inquiry**

- **Using photos to tell stories** was implemented as an assessment item in one Common Core course on poverty issues at HKU. The photo story method was employed together with an empathy map. Students were asked to take a photo that reflected poverty in the city and put themselves into others' shoes. Through the process, they needed to think critically and make an inquiry into the story behind the photo.
- **A two-stage report writing assessment for developing critical thinking** was designed for business students in an Australian university. In the first stage, students were required to identify the problem from a case study. Feedback was provided to students on their problem identification. In the second stage, students needed to search and read five articles in the literature that could offer insights into the problem. The critical thinking required of students involved identifying problems, finding, selecting and reading to comprehend sources, and constructing an argument (See Note 23).

Tricky Areas in Teaching across Cultures

How to Deal with Stereotypes?

It is not surprising to note that stereotypes exist almost everywhere. They can be in textbooks or reading materials while also emerge through classroom discussions. Good practices for teaching across cultures therefore involve teachers being sensitive to stereotypes, especially not to reinforce them. One thing to avoid is to treat students from a certain country as the representative of that country as if there is only one right answer²⁵. Individuals should be respected for their own opinions. According to Sklad and his associates²⁶, ‘...efforts should not reinforce existing stereotypes and binaries, but challenge students’ worldviews and lead towards the co-construction of knowledge’. Our interviews with the Common Core teachers at HKU showed that some of them were aware of the issue of stereotypes. For example, one teacher said during the interview that it would not be appropriate to ask students to explain the opinions of the people in their home country.

Are Asian Students Passive?

One common thought or stereotype is that Asian or Hong Kong students are shy and quiet in class. Teachers with this impression might think that they have to overcome students’ silence or shyness in their classroom facilitation. However, it has been argued that such perception of Asian students may be related to cultural differences in critical thinking or the effect of thinking in a second language^{27,28,29}. During our interviews with Common Core teachers at HKU, we found that a number of teachers had concerns about teaching large classes filled with students who were relatively less expressive. One teacher shared her experiences in breaking down the barriers by asking students to call her first name instead of Doctor. Gradually she found that students felt easier to talk to her. Other teachers tried to increase student interaction through activities such as blogging, debates, role-plays, simulations, and short questions. Moreover, a variety of assessment methods were used to assess students’ critical understanding of the complex connections between global issues and their everyday lives. Examples included research poster presentations, photo story, and reflective diary.

Shall We Mix International and Local Students?

There are certain beliefs that international and local students should be mixed in all kinds of group activities in order to maximise their interaction. However, research shows that this belief may not always be correct. For example, Tran and Pham³⁰ find that interaction between international and local students often remains at a surface level when meaningful connections and engagement opportunities are not in place. Leask³¹ suggests that mixing international and local students requires a clear purpose, which also needs to be well communicated to all students. For example, there could be a linkage between the group tasks and the cultural related learning outcomes.

Concluding Remarks

This briefing outlines five principles for teaching across cultures based on the literature and discusses three tricky areas that may concern some teachers. Teaching across cultures is never an easy task. However, teachers will have to face the challenges brought by multicultural classrooms as an inevitable result of the globalisation trend. Moreover, one should never underestimate the precious opportunities brought by multicultural classrooms in the aspect of developing international learning outcomes, such as cultural awareness and global citizenship. The ultimate goal is to achieve ‘internationalisation at home’ through creating a new context of teaching and learning for all students, regardless of their backgrounds³².



Acknowledgements

The briefing draws on interviews with a sample of Common Core coordinators and tutors who generously shared with us their experiences and insights, and we hope we have done justice to the wisdom of their practices in internationalising courses and the curriculum. Particular thanks go to Professor Cecilia Chan, Dr. Stacey Cherny, Dr. Tony Feng, Dr. Hugo Horta, Dr. Jessica King, Dr. Fiona Law, Professor Gina Marchetti, Dr. Kyung-Min Nam, Dr. David Pomfret, Ms. Michelle Tam, Professor Bo-sin Tang, Dr. Roland Vogt, Dr. Gilbert Wong, Professor Richard Wong, Dr. Timothy Wotherspoon, and to Professor Gray Kochhar-Lindgren, Director of the Common Core Curriculum, for their participation in this study as well as their warm encouragement and support. The authors would also like to express their deepest gratitude to Professor Dai Hounsell, Professor Emeritus in Higher Education, University of Edinburgh, and to Professor Grahame Bilbow, Director of the Centre for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, for their valuable advice and guidance along the time.

Photos in the briefing are courtesy of photolib@hku.hk

Notes

1. Ramburuth, P. & Catherine W. (2005). Educating the Global Manager. *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, 16(3), 5-27.
2. Arkoudis, S., Watty, K. Baik C., Yu, X., Borland, H., Chang, S., Lang, I., Lang, J., & Pearce, A. (2013). Finding common ground: Enhancing interaction between domestic and international students in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 18(3), 222-235.
3. HKU Common Core Curriculum <http://commoncore.hku.hk/introduction/>
4. Chang, J-S. (2006). A transcultural wisdom bank in the classroom: Making cultural diversity a key resource in teaching and learning. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(4), 369-377.
5. Zhao, T. & Bourne, J. (2011). Intercultural adaptation – It is a two-way process: Examples from a British MBA programme. In Jin, L-X. & Cortazzi, M. (Eds.). *Researching Chinese Learners: Skills, Perceptions and Intercultural Adaptations* (pp. 250-273). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
6. Sherry, M., Thomas, P., & Chui, W.H. (2010). International students: A vulnerable student population. *Higher Education*, 60, 33-46.
7. Lacina, J. G. (2002). Preparing international students for a successful social experience in higher education. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 117, 21-28.
8. Brown, G. T. L. (2010). The validity of examination essays in higher education: Issues and responses. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 64(3), 276-291.
9. Chanock, K. (2010). The right to reticence. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 15(5), 543-552.
10. Leask, B. & Carroll, J. (2013). *Learning and Teaching Across Cultures: Good Practice Principles and Quick Guides*. Melbourne: International Education Association of Australia (IEAA).
11. Arkoudis, S. (2006). *Teaching International Students: Strategies to Enhance Learning*. Melbourne: Centre for the Study of Higher Education, the University of Melbourne. <http://melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au/resources/teaching-in-practice>
12. Jabbar, A. & Hardaker, G. (2012). The role of culturally responsive teaching for supporting ethnic diversity in British University Business Schools. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 18(3), 272-284.
13. Leask, B. (2015). *Internationalisation of the Curriculum*. Abingdon: Routledge. p.89.
14. Sawir, E. (2011). Dealing with diversity in internationalized higher education institutions. *Intercultural Education*, 22(5), 381-394.
15. Maringe, F. & Sing, N. (2014). Teaching large classes in an increasingly internationalising higher education environment: Pedagogical, quality and equity issues. *Higher Education*, 67, 761-782.
16. Tran, L.T. & Pham, L. (2016). International students in transnational mobility: intercultural connectedness with domestic and international peers, institutions and the wider community. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 46(4), 560-581.
17. Bodycott, P., Mak, A. S., & Ramburuth, P. (2014). Utilising an internationalised curriculum to enhance students' intercultural interaction, engagement and adaptation. *Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 23(3), 635-643.
18. Leask, B. (2015). – see Note 13, p.30.
19. Haigh, M. (2014). From internationalisation to education for global citizenship: A multi-layered history. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 68(1), 6-17.
20. Intolubbe-Chmil, L., Spreen, C. A., & Swap, R. J. (2012). Transformative learning: Participant perspectives on international experiential education. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 11(2), 165-180.
21. Lee, T. M. L. (2005). Intercultural teaching in higher education. *Intercultural Education*, 16(3), 205-215.
22. Barnett, R. (1997). *Higher Education: A Critical Business*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
23. Hammer, S.J. & Green, W. (2011). Critical thinking in a first year management unit: The relationship between disciplinary learning, academic literacy and learning progression. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 30(3), 303-315.
24. Moore, T.J. (2011). Critical thinking and disciplinary thinking: A continuing debate. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 30(3), 261-274.
25. Dunworth, K. & Briguglio, C. (2011). *Teaching Students Who Have English as an Additional Language: A Handbook for Academic Staff in Higher Education*. Milperra, NSW: HERDSA Inc.
26. Sklad, M., Friedman, J., Park, E., & Oomen, B. (2015). Going Global: a qualitative and quantitative analysis of global citizenship education at a Dutch liberal arts and sciences college. *Higher Education*, DOI: 10.1007/s10734-015-9959-6.
27. Floyd, C.B. (2011) Critical thinking in a second language. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 30(3), 289-302.
28. Lun, V. M. C., Fischer, R., & Ward, C. (2010). Exploring cultural differences in critical thinking: Is it about my thinking style or the language I speak? *Learning and Individual Differences*, 20(6), 604-616.
29. Phakiti, A., Hirsh, D., & Woodrow, L. (2013). It's not only English: Effects of other individual factors on English language learning and academic learning of ESL international students in Australia. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 12(3), 239-258.
30. Tran, L.T. & Pham, L. (2016). – see Note 16.
31. Leask, B. (2015). – see Note 13, p.80.
32. Teekens, H. (2007). Internationalisation at home: An introduction. In Teekens, H. (Ed.). *Internationalisation at Home: Ideas and Ideals* (pp. 1-11). EAIE Occasional Paper 20. Amsterdam: European Association for International Education (EAIE).

Case Examples from HKU



Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens (CCGL9001)

The teacher conducted a survey at the first class to understand students' background as well as their perceptions about Hong Kong cinema. It has been noted that students from other countries, for example, South Korea, Japan, India, and Malaysia, have already had some knowledge about Hong Kong cinema through their past exposures to films and movie stars from Hong Kong. The teacher makes use of the diversity in cultural and knowledge backgrounds among students so that it turns out to be an asset for the course. Especially during student group presentations, students can learn from others' presentations about how people from different cultures might undertake the topic of Hong Kong cinema. Students also fill in a feedback form to provide comments to the presenting group after their presentation. A challenge in teaching is related to students' lack of background knowledge and vocabulary in communicating effectively about filming. To tackle this challenge, the teacher engages students in learning disciplinary vocabulary that enables them to talk about the filmmaking industry as well as aesthetic and cultural elements.

📞 Professor Gina Marchetti
✉ marchett@hku.hk

📞 Dr Fiona Law
✉ lawfiona@hku.hk

School of Humanities (Comparative Literature)
🌐 <http://commoncore.hku.hk/ccgl9001/>

Governance and Democracy in the Age of Globalisation (CCGL9004)

One challenge of teaching the subject is related to students' insufficient knowledge of the outside world. It has also been observed that some students hesitated in asking questions and participating in class discussion. The teacher establishes clearly a set of ground rules at the beginning of the course, emphasising that it is students' responsibility to clarify concepts if they have difficulties in understanding them and that it is not a problem for students to interrupt the teacher when there is a question to ask. Another principle the teacher advocates is that students from a particular culture or nation should not be treated as the representatives from their culture or country. The teacher subsequently helps students understand that everyone has freedom to express opinions, which could be different from those of the majority.

📞 Dr C. Roland Vogt
✉ crvogt@hku.hk

School of Modern Languages and Cultures
🌐 <http://commoncore.hku.hk/ccgl9004/>

Poverty, Development, and the Next Generation: Challenges for a Global World (CCGL9005)

In this course, students examine poverty and development, a serious challenge for a global world. They not only investigate factors leading to poverty on a theoretical base, but also 'feel' it through a series of carefully designed experiential learning activities. One of them is to ask students to experiment with survival on spending only ten Hong Kong dollars. The experience helps students reflect on common perceptions of poor people as being lazy and thus develop empathy towards people in poverty. The knowledge and attitudes will help students be more prepared to thrive in the globalised world, in which power and resources are not shared equally and poverty is still a widespread issue.

📞 Dr Hugo Horta
✉ horta@hku.hk

Faculty of Education
🌐 <http://commoncore.hku.hk/ccgl9005/>

The Political Economy of Growth and Poverty in the World (CCGL9025)

Covering the political and economic situations in a range of countries, poor and rich, the course helps students see the commonality among countries, including how similar the situations are for poorer people in different countries and how different the situations are for richer and poorer ones in the same country. The awareness creates conversations among students from different parts of the world regarding how we can achieve an objective understanding of the sources of enlarging inequality happening in many regions around the world. Engaging in these conversations about improving the well-being of people prepares students to become global citizens, who are aware that they have a responsibility to create a better world for people in poverty. Another challenge of teaching is related to assigned readings that demand students' time and background knowledge. Students are expected to read newspaper articles, scholarly essays and books that illustrate economic principles lurking behind growth and poverty. To ensure that students see the big picture and follow the main argument conveyed by the authors, the teacher carefully selects good books with summaries produced by professionals. Students can pleasantly read about a topic with the assistance of these references. The readings also show students how to apply quantitative data to critically interpret an issue.

📞 Professor Y.C. Richard Wong
✉ rycwong@hku.hk

Faculty of Business and Economics
🌐 <http://commoncore.hku.hk/ccgl9025/>

Think Global, Act Local: You, Hong Kong, and the World (CCGL9026)

Considering that there are a number of essay-type assignments in the course, the teachers acknowledge potential difficulties facing students from science and engineering disciplines that do not intensively require essay writing. In order to bridge the gap, the teachers give class participants clear instructions on the main goals and essential components of the assignment and offer guidance and assistance regarding how to formulate and articulate arguments, both inside and outside the classroom. The teachers also recommend that students look at the issue from the perspective of their own discipline. For example, the teachers encourage engineering students to think about potential technological solutions to Hong Kong's environmental problems while asking those with social science backgrounds to explore existing political or other institutional constraints that may hinder the actual application of the solutions. Creating such a multidisciplinary environment promotes mutual learning among students with diverse backgrounds, which is increasingly important in understanding complex global and local problems and formulating potential solutions to them.

① Professor Bo-sin Tang (former coordinator) ① Dr Kyung-Min Nam (current coordinator)
✉ bsbstang@hku.hk ✉ kmnam@hku.hk
Department of Urban Planning and Design
🌐 <http://commoncore.hku.hk/ccgl9026/>

The Evolution of Civilisation (CCGL9042)

With the observation that students often cluster with others in the same tutorial group or people similar to them, the teacher tries to design some assessment components that can encourage interaction among students in different groups and from different backgrounds. For example, the blog assignment is designed in a way that students can respond to and interact with others who are not in their assigned tutorial group. Any students can make an opening statement on the topic for discussion and react to others' comments. The online blog platform also enables students to participate at anytime from anywhere.

① Dr Stacey Cherny
✉ cherny@hku.hk
Centre for Genomic Sciences
🌐 <http://commoncore.hku.hk/ccgl9042/>

Case Examples from HKU



Energy: Its Evolution and Environmental Impacts (CCST9016)

Though energy consumption and its environmental impacts is a global issue, the teacher acknowledges that students from different regions tend to show interest in different topics for their case study presentation. One pattern observed through an assignment is that local Hong Kong students tend to look at the situations within Hong Kong, for example, the energy consumption of travelling from HKU to Central. Students from other places in Asia tend to be more interested in issues in the region. Another cultural difference noted by the teacher is that many Asian students tend to agree with what has been said in the book or journal article. In order to bring a critical perspective to the course, the teacher intentionally divides a tutorial into four sub-groups, each reading one article about global warming. These articles contain contradictory opinions about what causes global warming. Students are then required to discuss with those in the other sub-groups about whether they agree or disagree with the perspectives presented in the articles. Flipped classroom is used as another strategy to prepare students for group discussion on renewable energy technologies.

① Dr Tony S.P. Feng
✉ hpfeng@hku.hk

Department of Mechanical Engineering
🌐 <http://commoncore.hku.hk/ccst9016/>

Dr Hui, S.C.M. (2015, Nov 20). CCST9016 Energy: Its Evolution and Environmental Impacts <http://www.mech.hku.hk/bse/CCST9016/>

The Oceans: Science and Society (CCST9023) & Understanding Climate Change (CCST9019)

The multiple active learning activities designed in these two courses have energised students working in their groups. It is observed that the fun, enjoyment and challenges embedded in these groupwork tasks (for example, a Black Box assignment, a marine pollution project, the role play of UN Climate Summit, and a field trip to a geopark) are the important elements that enable students from different disciplinary and cultural backgrounds to talk to each other and collaboratively explore the principles of science. The teacher also notices that the more diversified a student group is, the more dynamic and interesting approaches will emerge. Another observation is that the difference in students is not solely from cultural backgrounds, but disciplinary and personality factors. Leveraging the diversity can greatly benefit the class dynamics and learning atmosphere.

① Dr Jess King
✉ jessking@hku.hk

Department of Earth Sciences
🌐 <http://commoncore.hku.hk/ccst9019/>

Simplifying Complexity (CCST9048)

One challenge of teaching is to encourage students to explore alternatives or use an innovative way to solve problems because some students in Hong Kong or more generally from some Asian cultures are more interested in what the best practice is and how to apply it correctly. The tendency to conform may inhibit these students from critically analysing and evaluating multiple approaches while these abilities are regarded as important in the Common Core Curriculum. Recognising the need to adjust teaching for these students with such a tendency, the teacher tries to provide scaffolding by firstly showing some clear and simple examples, then presenting the unsolved problems, and finally asking students to think about why some of these problems still remain unsolved. A similar way is to show one obvious solution to the problem, tear it down with counter-arguments from other evidence, and challenge students to evaluate which side of the argument is more convincing.

① Dr Timothy Wotherspoon
✉ wothersp@hku.hk

Faculty of Science
🌐 <http://commoncore.hku.hk/ccst9048/>

Making History: Engaging with the Powerful Past (CCHU9003)

The course uses active learning activities that help engender intercultural conversations. One example is the scavenger hunt, facilitated by an interactive, automated online programme. Students join groups, each with their own distinct itinerary to uncover and scrutinize historical artifacts in Central. At each of the sites they visit the programme prompts them to answer MCQ and text entry type questions. Accurate and creative answers unlock the next location on their itinerary. The excitement and challenge of the game taking place outside the classroom effectively breaks down boundaries between students from different cultural backgrounds, as they pore over the various challenges together. It is not uncommon for groups to complete all 16 sites in the game – the maximum number possible. Similarly, in lectures, the teacher encourages peer learning by interspersing content delivery with short interactive exercises, around every ten minutes or so, to reinforce key points being made. Another useful method enabling meaningful intercultural engagement involves short written responses during the class. Students are asked to write a very short answer to a provocative question posted by the teacher. One example is ‘what nation do you feel you belong to and why?’ Students’ answers are collected and become the focal point of a cross-cultural discussion in the following class. In such a way, different perspectives and values are solicited, acknowledged, and openly discussed.

① Dr David Pomfret
✉ pomfret@hku.hk

School of Humanities
🌐 <http://commoncore.hku.hk/cchu9003/>, <http://www.history.hku.hk/cchu9003/>

The Last Dance: Understanding Death and Dying (CCHU9024)

The course focuses on a heavy topic that some students initially feel uneasy to talk about. The matter related to death is also a sensitive topic in some cultures. During tutorials when students are more ready to speak up, the teacher encourages students to listen to and learn from the thoughts and experiences of other students regarding how they dealt with death and grief in their personal lives. When possible, the teacher also asks students not to group with friends so that they will have an opportunity to talk to people that they are not familiar with. A useful technique to encourage sharing of opinions during tutorials is to give students sufficient time to think about the topic (in this case, a 10-minute self-reflection) and then ask them to share their thoughts with a small group. The think time and a small group setting in tutorials help students build confidence in touching this sensitive topic. In addition to experiential learning activities and tutorial discussions, the course connects students to theories on death and dying from global and interdisciplinary perspectives. For example, students visit the oldest coffin in Hong Kong, and reflect on the values of life as well as the social and economic circumstances in the past century.

① Professor Cecilia Chan
✉ cecichan@hku.hk
Department of Social Work and Social Administration
🌐 <http://commoncore.hku.hk/cchu9024/>

Chinese Business Practice and Society: Past and Present (CCCH9021)

Students in this course learn to look at the effects of social and political institutions on business activities, and work with fellow students to consequently identify success factors to business in the global economy. A range of assessment components are devised, which allow students from different backgrounds to excel in at least some of them. First, students in groups are given the opportunity to freely choose a topic related to government-business relations for their group project. The presentation needs to be delivered through videos and students are encouraged to apply multimedia tools to enhance their storytelling. Another group project is a web library. Every student needs to use the Internet for research and create 5 to 10 annotated web links. Students also complete an individual essay with the topic at their own choice, which allows them to make use of their different cultural and geographical backgrounds to construct the arguments. In tutorials, the teacher tries to use international and local students as learning resources by encouraging them to share their feelings about business practices in their familiar cultural environment. The success of this strategy relies on trust built in the classroom.

① Dr Gilbert Wong
✉ gilwong@business.hku.hk
School of Business
🌐 <http://commoncore.hku.hk/ccch9021/>



ACCOMMODATING AND RESPECTING DIVERSITY

Preparing pre-service teachers for teaching in multicultural classrooms (US and Australia)

This paper focused on how to prepare teachers for multicultural teaching in a globalised world. The results showed that short-term international teaching experiences were helpful in raising awareness of global perspectives. Pre-service teachers reported that they valued the international teaching experiences and the close interaction with the teaching contexts in the host university. The three overseas language teaching and learning programmes in Indonesia, Korea and China involved off-shore teaching, immersion or homestay experience. It was also suggested that short-term international experiences could help sensitise teachers to the frustrations that their students might face when learning a foreign language. To summarise, international teaching experiences could improve pre-service teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions for teaching from a global perspective.

Olmedo, I. & Harbon, L. (2010). Broadening our sights: Internationalising teacher education for a global arena. *Teaching Education*, 21(1), 75-88.

Students' perception of internationalisation (Israeli)

Seeing students' dual role as customers and outputs in the process of institutional internationalisation, this paper investigated students' perceptions of internationalisation through a questionnaire survey at seven colleges in Israel. It was found that English proficiency was a significant predictor of the level of openness towards internationalisation. Other predictors included parents' education, previous experiences abroad as well as participation of on-campus international activities. As for implications for policy decisions, the findings suggested the need for more outcome-oriented approaches to internationalisation.

Yemini, M., Holzmann, V., Fadilla, D., Natur, N., & Stavans, A. (2014). Israeli college students' perceptions of internationalisation. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 24(3), 304-323.

PROVIDING CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS AND SPECIFIC SUPPORT

Strategies for supporting international students in academic writing (Australia)

This study explored strategies for supporting international students in academic writing at an Australian university. All lecturers tried to explain the criteria and expectations as explicitly as possible. Though this was helpful, some students voiced that they did not fully understand the meanings of certain terms used in the criteria. Most lecturers felt challenging to provide guidance in academic writing partially because they were not certain about what

constituted 'good writing' in their disciplines. A whole institutional approach has been recommended, which involves developing university strategies that incorporate academic language development under the broader area of internationalising the curriculum; identifying subjects that will emphasise the learning and teaching of academic writing within the discipline through course mapping; and enhancing collaboration with language supporting unit and raising students' awareness to seek help.

Arkoudis, S., & Tran, L. (2010). Writing blah, blah, blah: Lecturers' approaches and challenges in supporting international students. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 22(2), 169-178.

Exploring cultural issues in public health practice through an orientation workshop (US)

A mandatory full-day workshop was designed for public health students to address issues of diversity and inclusiveness in the classroom and fieldwork settings. The workshop provided a structured environment for students to explore topics related to personal identity, power and privilege. It was found that the format of the exercises (e.g., self-disclosure) and a sufficient understanding of the social background would be helpful to student learning. Two recommendations have been made. First, the workshop themes need to be better integrated into class contents throughout the curriculum. Second, follow-up sessions and activities are essential for students to move beyond self-awareness to the social and global issues of the programme.

Cushman, L. F., Delva, M., Franks, C. L., Jimenez-Bautista, A., Moon-Howard, J., Glover, J., & Begg, M. D. (2015). Cultural competency training for public health students: Integrating self, social, and global awareness into a Master of Public Health curriculum. *American journal of public health*, 105(S1), S132-S140.

Integrating international students into the community (Canada)

This paper presented a case study of a non-credit bearing 11-week programme on professional learning and cultural adjustment. The programme provided international students with support to adapt to an unfamiliar Canadian academic culture. There were three components: in-depth discussions on expectations for graduate students and teaching assistants; a simulation activity for raising awareness of cultural differences; and classes on effective teaching across cultures. One feature of the programme was the use of cooperative learning activities to generate discussions of cross-cultural communication. Activities included case studies, role plays, and critical incidents. Subsequently the participants built a supportive community and network themselves. The success of the programme suggested that it required collective efforts from all faculty members, staff and students at the host university to build an inclusive cross-cultural campus.

Guo, S., & Chase, M. (2011). Internationalisation of higher education: Integrating international students into Canadian academic environment. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 16(3), 305-318.

FACILITATING INTERCULTURAL INTERACTION

Cultivating culturally competent practitioners through reflection (US)



This paper proposed that students' cultural competence could be enhanced by incorporating international service learning into the curriculum. It described a project where dietetic students completed a one-week supervised community dietetic practice in Central America. One unique feature of the project was a method of reflection which included a brief discussion of the day's events, a group blog, and planning for the next day's activities. The paper concluded that teaching cultural competence did not end with the completion of the service learning experience. To shape students' practice, an on-going transformational process needs to be facilitated through regular instructor-led discussions, reflection, and journaling.

Wright, L., & Lundy, M. (2014). Perspectives of cultural competency from an international service Learning Project. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 114(7), 999-1000.

The effects of students being 'forced' to work in multicultural teams (UK)



This study presents two cases which require students to work in multicultural teams for a semester of 14 weeks. In Study 1, 50 Spanish and seven Erasmus economics students worked in self-selected teams. In Study 2, 69 international students in a postgraduate management program in the United Kingdom worked in randomised teams. Around 72% of the international students were from Confucian Asian and Southern Asian countries, primarily China, Thailand, and India. After a semester's work, strong learning relationships between international students and local students were observed in both case studies. This showed that working together in multinational teams for a substantial period on several authentic and complex team products helped students overcome some initial cultural barriers.

Rienties, B., Jindal-Snape, D., Nanclares, N. H., & Alcott, P. (2012). The role of cultural background and team divisions in developing social learning relations in the classroom. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 17(4), 332-353.

Intercultural interaction and student engagement (Hong Kong and Australia)



This paper presents case studies of effective approaches of improving intercultural student interaction in one university in Hong Kong and two universities in Australia. The essential conditions found in all the three case studies included a supportive policy environment, a curriculum emphasis on cross-cultural awareness and active cultural learning; and recognition of domestic and international students as resources. In the case study at the Hong Kong Institute of Education (now the Education University of Hong Kong), a compulsory course for incoming non-local students was introduced. International and local students were intentionally paired up to discuss a local cultural problem. Students needed to examine local artefacts and conduct field-based research in pairs or small groups.

Bodycott, P., Mak, A.S., & Ramburuth, P. (2014). Utilising an internationalised curriculum to enhance students' intercultural Interaction, engagement and adaptation. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 23(3), 635-643.

Dynamics of intercultural contact (Ireland)



This study investigated university students' motivation for voluntarily engaging in intercultural contact on campus. The interview findings indicated that the most prevalent motivation for interacting with students from other cultures was based upon utility, which referred to perceived beneficial outcomes such as improving foreign language skills and establishing social networks. Less influential factors were concerns for others; having a shared future; and interest and curiosity. It was argued that universities should identify the benefits of intercultural contact; raise students' awareness of its potential value; and equip students with the abilities to cope with cultural diversity.

Dunne, C. (2013). Exploring motivations for intercultural contact among host country university students: An Irish case study. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 37(5), 567-578.

DEVELOPING GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Studying abroad for experiential, inquiry-based coursework (US)



A US university collaborated with three universities in southern Africa to run a one-month intensive study abroad programme in which students examined the influences between the environment and society. The programme included lectures, site visits, reflective exercises, as well as cultural encounters with the communities in South Africa and Mozambique. This paper examined the extent to which study abroad opportunities could transform students' mindsets and their engagement with the world around them. The survey findings suggested that host students felt positive about their roles as instructors, practitioners and local experts. Students also valued engagement with communities and the practical application of projects, as well as informal learning opportunities from multiple sources.

Intolubbe-Chmil, L., Spreen, C. A., & Swap, R. J. (2012). Transformative learning: Participant perspectives on international experiential education. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 11(2), 165-180.

PROMOTING CRITICAL THINKING AND DEEP INQUIRY

Critical thinking development in a first-year management class (Australia)



This paper presents an assessment design that aimed to develop critical thinking in a first-year management class in a large Australian university. The authors redesigned the report writing assessment from one single report to a two-stage report writing process. In the first stage, students were required to identify the problem from a brief case study through asking themselves three questions: What is the problem? What is the context of the problem? Why is it a problem? In the second stage, they needed to locate and read at least five journal articles to support their analysis and argument. Students developed the skills in problem identification, locating proper literature, and formulating an argument. Additionally, the two-stage assessment design allowed students to receive timely feedback during the problem identification stage.

Hammer, S. J. & Green, W. (2011). Critical thinking in a first year management unit: The relationship between disciplinary learning, academic literacy and learning progression. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 30(3), 303-315.