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Student Engagement: Key Skills, Social Capital, and Encouraging Learner Contributions to Module Resources

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Abstract

This 5-year project involves a Masters international political economy module, taught annually to diverse cohorts studying an MSc in international business. The module addresses challenges to global stability and the business environment. Students are invited to work in groups to create researched presentations on any country where issues of governance, political dysfunction, or stresses relating to globalization affect economic and political development. Countries ranging from St Lucia to Myanmar, from China to Romania, have featured. This student-generated, student-selected work provides a developing resource for the module, available on the Virtual Learning Platform. The initiative showcases student-centred learning and positive student engagement through independent learning, key skills, group work and research, as well as personal emotional engagement. Importantly, students bring prior experience and own-country knowledge to the wider cohort, encouraging and enabling internationalist perspectives, sharing experience, and comparison between diverse situations and challenges. The project therefore promotes a holistic form of student engagement and facilitates cross-cultural understanding and sharing of cultural capital to generate educational capital.

Keywords

Student engagement; cultural capital; social capital; internationalization; student-centred learning; key skills.

This article describes an initiative designed to promote student engagement (SE) by providing international students with opportunities to select, research, design and deliver course content related to their countries of origin and thereby broaden the geographic scope of the module in question. The activity enables significant benefits for the learners in respect of SE. It provides opportunities for key skills development, but also a rich personal and emotional engagement. It facilitates sharing of social capital between students by allowing them to draw on their own experiences and prior learning.

The article has three main sections. First, the theoretical context underpinning the activity is described, explaining contested meanings of student engagement (Milburn-Shaw and Walker 2017) and notions of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1980), social capital (Coleman 1988; Lesser 2000), internationalization (Knight 2003; de Wit 2011) and constructivism (Tenenbaum et al. 2001). A further key concept underpinning the activity is active citizenship (British Council 2011). Following a broad theoretical discussion, the activity, its context and its pedagogical method is described. Concluding remarks explain how the activity can be applied in a variety of disciplines.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Student engagement (SE) is a notion with a motherhood-and-apple-pie aura: few would doubt that it is 'a good thing' and it has emerged as a strategic priority for every university and a cause celebre for the Higher Education Academy, the Quality Assurance Agency and higher education (HE) thinktanks everywhere (Anyangwe 2011). Regrettably, however, SE has been subsumed within metrics used to judge the suitability and relevance of courses in an increasingly marketized, instrumental approach

to higher education (Milburn-Shaw and Walker 2017). It is increasingly measured by instruments like the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), the National Student Survey (NSS) and the Post Graduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES). It tends to be judged quantitatively, according to attendance, participation, assessment marks and ultimately, the class and the degree awarded. It has become incorporated into a key skills agenda fundamental to 'graduateness' and 'employability'. This conception of SE has emerged together with the instrumentalisation of the university as an agent serving government-defined needs of the national and international economy, including the imperative of economic growth.

Key skills are a set of competences that higher education (HE) aims to develop and which serve to enhance graduate employability. The Dearing Report (Dearing 1997) two decades ago identified communication skills, numeracy, the use of information technology and crucially, learning how to learn. Successive governments have promoted a close relationship between employers and HE, privileging the role of organisations like the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) in determining the skills graduates should have to best meet the needs of the economy. A survey of employers' expectations identified the following key skills: team working, problem solving, self-management, literacy and numeracy, ICT knowledge, good interpersonal and communication skills, ability to use own initiative and to follow instructions, and leadership skills where necessary (Lowden et al. 2011). The CBI (2007) cited a positive attitude, self-management, team working, problem solving, communication and literacy, numeracy and IT skills as fundamental attributes of employability. The exercise reported in this article offers practice in all these areas.

A fees regime that renders students as consumers has further legitimised the notion of employability, which successive governments appear to view as a key arbiter in assessing the worth of a degree. Universities are viewed first and foremost as servants of national economic needs. Correspondingly, key skills and their assessment is an important component of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), introduced in 2016 as a new metric in evaluating university performance (BIS 2016).

An alternative view of SE is 'a difficult-to-measure, holistic and abstract transition that students undergo throughout their higher education career' (Milburn-Shaw and Walker 2017, 54). It focuses on cognitive-emotional value, promoting a holistic approach to students and their learning, a developmental process of discovery about the world and one's place within it. This fits the traditional understanding of 'what the university is for' – an opportunity for wider learning and self-discovery, to achieve better understanding, to develop critical perspectives, analytical competence and a drive to make the world a better, more sustainable place. This critical perspective implies reform and betterment, rather than acquiescence in a system-maintaining mindset. It avoids the increasingly utilitarian approach found in professional training or the single-minded pursuit of a required qualification as *a thing to have*, rather than a focus on the process through which the qualification is achieved.

In the exercise described here, the critical perspective is of central importance. The project involves students studying an International Political Economy (IPE) module in an international business degree in a Management School. The module may be regarded, within the usual business school context, as subversive, since it challenges many preconceptions, including the presumption that the core purpose of the degree is to provide a stepping stone to a position as a 'manager' or 'business leader', well remunerated and enjoying high status. Indeed, in many cases the choice of studies may have been made by aspirational parents in emerging market economies, especially the Peoples Republic of China (PRC), the home of typically 70 per cent of the students on the module. The remaining 30 per cent are from many countries, so cohorts have been highly diverse, an important factor, as shall become apparent.

The activity is a distinctive and innovative example of learning and teaching practice. It is designed to promote and develop both the instrumental key skills type of SE as well as the cognitive-emotional dimension. The latter relates to utilising students' cultural capital (Bourdieu 1980). The initiative delivers benefits in terms of internationalizing the SE and enhancing cross-cultural understanding by encouraging students in a diverse cohort to deliver course content related to their own country. It therefore facilitates sharing of cultural capital. For Bourdieu, cultural capital is an asset shared among groups that contributes to class identity. The origins of this concept are found in Marxist thought and can be utilised in acts of exchange among different groups, in much the same way as occurs with economic capital. Bourdieu's notion has been applied to the international classroom setting, as learners with different provenances bring diverse cultural capital which may, given appropriate encouragement, provide opportunities for others to learn about other countries and the world. The notion of cultural capital recognises and celebrates a diversity of knowledge and experience and even values, between groups. It is not about the homogenisation of cultures but more about developing an appreciation of this diversity and better non-judgemental understanding of difference. The sharing of cultural capital therefore enhances understanding and promotes an emotional-cognitive type of SE, being geared towards shared goals. These should be articulated and nurtured by the teaching and learning environment, so the tutor's role is to facilitate sharing of cultural capital. Bourdieu noted how cultural capital may be objectified in academic qualifications and appropriated by institutions in reward systems, a process resembling 'social alchemy' (Bourdieu 1986).

The notion of cultural capital has been extended into social capital in analysing how organisations work, especially in the digital age (Lesser 2000). Social capital 'is about the value created by fostering connections between individuals' (ibid i). The interest in social capital has been judged neo-capitalist, somewhat different to Bourdieu's understanding, and a product of 'American Communitarianism' (Julien 2015, 356). Julien argues that Bourdieu understood social capital as 'class goods', typically used to exclude others and to conserve community resources, so evidently the notion of social capital, while having its origins in Bourdieu, has developed markedly different characteristics. Julien considers an integrative view of social relations within which social capital equates with public goods, not class goods (Lin 1999, 2000; Huysman and Wulf 2004; Daly and Silver 2008). Social capital may also equate with 'civiness', an idea articulated by Putnam (1993) for whom social capital means 'features of social organizations, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit. Working together is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital' (ibid 35-6).

The project is grounded in this trend among educationalists and begins from an assumption that internationally diverse cohorts provide opportunities for sharing knowledge and experience and developing mutual understanding, while developing learners' confidence and self-belief that their prior learning and cultural background are significant assets in a learning community. In this way the project utilises positive SE, valuing cognitive-emotional commitment to one's own life experience, prior learning and interest in societal betterment. However, the activity also meets the institutional need to develop key skills, an established trend in HE reflected in module and programme learning outcomes (Bell and Egan n.d.). At the same time a bias towards the cognitive-emotional element in SE is evident in that the activity is not formally assessed, plays only a tangential part in the module summative assessment, and is not compulsory.

The HE environment has been greatly affected by contemporary economic globalization, with increased international competition and opportunities afforded by higher disposable incomes for many, especially in new and emerging markets. Hans de Wit, commenting on university internationalization strategies, says 'It is indisputable that competition and market processes have more and more influence on the manner in which internationalization is implemented' (de Wit

2011). He defines internationalization as 'a process by which intercultural, international and global dimensions are introduced into higher education to improve the goals, functions and delivery of higher education and to improve the quality of education and research' (ibid).

Universities' internationalization strategies reflect an economic rationale (Yang 2003; Middlehurst and Woodfield 2007). Turner and Robson (2008) refer to 'symbolic' internationalization which delivers massive expansion in numbers of students studying overseas, mainly in the USA, the UK and Australia. This exponential growth is driven by processes broadly encompassed within the notion of globalization, defined as 'the intensification of worldwide social relations linking distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many thousands of miles away and vice versa' (Giddens 1991:70).

However, Middlehurst and Woodfield also highlight other concepts and behaviours such as international citizenship, comparing practice and performance, learning from others, developing international links to raise national and international profile, improving understanding across borders and providing a counter-balance to ideological tensions around globalization. It is this broader conceptualisation of internationalization, also described as the 'transformative' model (Turner and Robson 2008), that relates to the notion of social capital underpinning the approach described in this article. Moreover, the initiative encourages students to create module content, so it contributes to the curriculum of a degree.

Internationalization strategies should reflect student-centeredness (Fielden 2007). This contrasts with the 'marketization of higher education', governed by foreign student recruitment which under the gaze of university accountants and financial controllers aims to boost revenue (Molesworth et al. 2009; Collini 2011; Nixon et al. 2016). Marketization promotes the economic benefits of higher education rather than any cultural factors (HM Government 2010, 2011; Warner 2015). It engineers an ethos through which students are consumers of a product focused on getting a degree, consolidating the commodification of higher education (Molesworth et al. 2009; Nixon et al. 2016). The UK government has prioritised boosting competition across the sector, encouraging market mechanisms, removing the cap on student numbers and encouraging new entrants with degree awarding powers (HM Government 2016). Innovations reflecting similar imperatives include a government standards agency, the Office for Students - and the idea to have universities publish graduate earnings as a further metric in institutional and even degree comparisons. The increased commercialisation of the sector, promoted by government as enabling 'consumer choice', risks furthering a market-driven understanding of internationalization, undermining the contribution diversity can bring to enhancing social capital. As HEIs focus recruitment on lucrative markets such as China this means less diverse student cohorts, already evident in many UK departments - especially in business and management schools which are often institutional 'cash cows'.

A well-known definition of internationalization is 'the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution' (Knight 1994), later modified to 'the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education' (Knight 2003). This understanding of internationalization underpins this initiative since it aims to ensure that other countries and regions are referred to in the module. This raises the profile of minority groups in a student body dominated by PRC nationals and where the second largest group has been Europeans, a diminishing group perhaps due to a 'Brexit effect' making the UK less appealing for EU students. The initiative has meant other countries and regions gain profile and representation in module resources, echoing a plea for those seldom heard to be given a voice (Freire 2001) and the exhortation that pedagogy should use opportunities presented by multilingual and ethnically diverse student populations (Canagarajah 2007).

Internationalization in our universities should embrace internationalism, defined as ‘a commitment to wider societal benefits as represented in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and UN Development Goals’ (Sweeney 2010). Internationalism seeks greater intercultural understanding by encouraging students to learn about and empathise with others’ experiences. The reference to the UN Declaration (United Nations 1948) and UNDGs (United Nations 2015) insists that educators have a responsibility to help students and graduates make the world a better more tolerant place, so the concept of internationalism is vital. Moreover, sharing cultural capital exploits student mobility, embracing the knowledge and experience of degree mobile students, i.e. those undertaking an entire course away from their home country (Sweeney 2012). This enhances the learning experience for all students, home and overseas, mobile and non-mobile.

The activity exploits existing cultural capital within the cohort and develops academic or educational capital from this (Howard et al. 1996; Lesser 2000; Phillipson 2010). Some scholars have voiced concern about the linguistic hegemony of a standard ‘high status’ variety of English in UK HEIs, where linguistic diversity, pluralism and multiculturalism may be regarded as problematic, rather than indicative of a diverse and linguistically and culturally rich community (Martin 2009; Preece and Martin 2009; Preece 2009, 2011). The dominance of English, and the presumption of superior status for standard varieties, may undermine the preparedness of speakers of other codes of English, including non-native speakers to actively contribute to classroom debate, or to present in a seminar. Classroom practice should develop all students’ awareness of how to improve their communicative competence within international and linguistically diverse learning contexts, while also valuing different codes or varieties of English (Wicaksono 2012). This perspective challenges any implied superiority of the standard code and is an important aspect of the intercultural dimension of this initiative in that it encourages participation by speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds, utilising different varieties of English and different linguistic codes. Different varieties of English is an obvious characteristic of diverse cohorts, an increasingly common experience in many universities throughout Europe and beyond.

Students are resources of knowledge and experience and they need encouragement to be autonomous learners. The teaching and learning process must be multidirectional and inclusive. It should foster a democratic and egalitarian ethos within which all participants, students and tutors, share in the learning experience, learning from each other. This openness enables cultural capital to generate the educational capital that enhances the teaching and learning process and enables learners to develop the skills, knowledge and other assets that enable them to derive long-term benefit from their schooling. Educational capital is an intangible asset that enables individuals to benefit from learning opportunities within formal educational settings; it also prepares them for future learning, suggesting a foundation for lifelong learning (Howard et al. 1996).

Milburn-Shaw and Walker (2017) criticise the instrumental nature of the Bologna Process which underpins the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)¹. But the Leuven Communiqué, a key EHEA reference point, emphasises the importance of student-centred learning, ‘(the empowerment of) individual learners, new approaches to teaching and learning, effective support and guidance structures and a curriculum focused more clearly on the learner’ (Leuven Communiqué 2009: 3). It underlines how student-centred learning enhances employability by preparing students to cope with a changing labour market, improving lifelong learning abilities and skills, while also helping them become engaged and responsible citizens. The principles and practice of the EHEA embrace both the utilitarian and the cognitive-emotional strands of SE, especially through encouraging curriculum, institutional partnering, student mobility, cultural diversity, language learning and faculty exchange. There is no contradiction between EHEA fundamentals such as student-centred learning and a holistic approach to SE combined with the positive exploitation of cultural capital. Student- (or

learner-) centred learning improves student performance and promotes the social context for innovation learning (Barraket 2005), echoing the notion of sharing social capital referred to above.

The activity described in this article reflects a constructivist approach dependent on student participation and active learning (Papert 1980; Papert and Harel 1991; Davis and Sumara 2002; TeAchnology 2011). A study of constructivist practice in HE identified seven components of a constructivist approach to teaching and learning: 1) arguments, discussions, debates; 2) conceptual conflicts and dilemmas; 3) sharing ideas with others; 4) materials and measures targeted toward solutions; 5) reflections and concept investigation; 6) meeting student needs; 7) making meaning, real-life examples (Tenenbaum et al. 2001). These features are all reflected in the practice described in this paper and consistent with the principles and practice of student-centred pedagogy (Barraket 2005). Constructivist pedagogy enables learners to construct knowledge for themselves (Hein 1991). The practice reported in this article, being focused on group research, team work and group presentation, has a markedly social constructivist orientation where interaction between learners and with the tutor as facilitator are key (Jadallah 2000; Maypole and Davis 2001). It also gives students autonomy in selecting subject matter (Gibbs 1992).

The activity depends on learners making use of their prior experience and nurturing the ability to re-shape assumptions in the light of new experiences and new ideas, including the concepts taught in the early part of the module. The tutor/facilitator role is to ensure opportunities for learners to make use of their experiences and make fresh discoveries. It exploits the concept of spatial citizenship (Gryl et al. 2010; Gryl and Jekel 2012) by developing opportunities to consider diverse geographies and locations. It promotes active citizenship (Mascherini et al. 2009) through understanding the role of place in society. The European Commission DG Education and Culture adopted the notion of spatial citizenship in its SPACIT initiative, aimed at secondary education but with implications for the tertiary sector. It seeks to promote an active citizenship that highlights the common needs and aspirations of different communities, underpinned by notions of human rights and environmental sustainability (Spatial Citizenship 2015). It fosters an interdisciplinary approach that connects social sciences, civics education, geoinformatics, didactics and teacher training. It deals with mainstream technology, as well as new ITC developments relevant and essential for teacher education and practice at all levels. The British Council echoes SPACIT through its own active citizenship initiative which aims to develop 'a world where people are empowered to engage peacefully and effectively with others in the sustainable development of their communities' (British Council 2011, 7).

In all instances since the initiative began in 2013 maps have been a significant visual support for students introducing the featured countries. This may seem a trivial point, but for many learners this may be the first time they have encountered the country concerned in a classroom, or at all, so learning basic geography of the Caribbean or of West Africa for example is significant, the more so for being the home of certain classmates. Considering such issues as natural resources, climate and infrastructure for these countries may often be a first for many. Depending on the choices made by the students involved, their contributions may address specific challenges such as democracy, human rights, law and governance, as well as political economy in general.

The practice emphasises student-centred learning, a student-focused and peer-oriented pedagogy (Mazur 1997). It challenges and changes the traditional learning environment where the teacher is knower and students listen and absorb 'facts', or the teacher's enlightened interpretation of knowledge. A learner-centred approach offers space for students' aspirations and involves their recognising opportunities for self-realisation and improved competence (Kumar 2007). Students are active learners engaged in making choices, a prerequisite for establishing a pattern for lifelong learning, a key skill central to good pedagogical practice that empowers graduates and improves employability. This activity gives learners choice in materials selection and themes and countries on

which to focus. They choose how the theory presented in the module relates to specific country circumstances that might otherwise not be highlighted. The activity provides a focus on the circumstances of specific communities, with the additional benefit of underlining how every country and community is impacted by the dynamics of the international political economy, echoing Giddens's definition of globalization cited above. It also allows for meaningful debate about positive and negative impacts of globalization.

In summary, the practice permits a holistic interpretation of student engagement underpinned by theories of cultural and social capital, generating educational capital. It involves an internationalisation ethos that celebrates diversity, mutual understanding and respect, and sharing learning about others' experiences and cultures. It echoes constructivist logic in developing empathy between learners that can foster a willingness to embrace global citizenship in the interests of common understanding and shared responsibility for improving the lives of all humanity. This ambition equates to an ideal type of graduate, not simply the utilitarian assumptions of neoliberal governance that pushes the marketisation of universities, obliging them to operate like private companies in a competitive environment where their primary function is to serve corporate and national economic interests.

CLASSROOM CONTEXT AND MECHANICS OF THE ACTIVITY

The module involved is *International Political Economy and Business*, a core autumn term module in three international business and management-related MSc programmes at York Management School, University of York. The subject content deals with globalization, corporate social responsibility, Neoliberalism, international trade and development, themes introduced in the opening weeks of the module. Learners are encouraged to think about how globalization and specifically the dominant ideological force that drives globalizing processes, Neoliberalism (Gray 2010), impacts upon states and communities.

Students are asked to contribute original work based on their own research through a presentation supported by related reading. The eventual PowerPoint slides and associated reading material are uploaded to the module Virtual Learning Platform (VLP). Student material therefore contributes directly to module content and is accessible to all. Students benefit from hearing presentations by their peers who choose to engage with this opportunity. The broad theme of the contributions, which are voluntary and depend on students choosing to contribute, is 'the impact of contemporary economic globalization on a newly industrialised or developing country'. Students choose how to interpret this. They may opt for a generic broad-brush approach or focus on a specific industry or community and describe how it has been affected by globalization in general; or they may choose a specific aspect of globalization, or an incidence of international trade, or government or institutional policy.

The voluntary aspect of the activity is important. The protagonists are a self-selecting subset of the cohort, so are already predisposed towards a cognitive-emotional engagement with the issue they focus on. It is significant that the presentations are not formally assessed, though they are tutor-evaluated as to suitability for uploading. Participation is a clear indication of creative and cognitive engagement and the students contribute to class learning and that of future cohorts since the work adds to a bank of student-generated materials serving the module.

As mentioned, most students on the module – around 70 per cent - have historically been from the PRC. The rest are highly diverse, with up to 30 countries represented. It is beyond the scope of this article to go deeply into this, but experience has shown that students from other countries tend to focus on damaging impacts of globalization (sweat-shop labour in Bangladesh, multinationals

dominating Costa Rican banana production, financial instability in the Bahamas, low wages in *maquiladoras* close to the US border in Mexico, pollution from oil spills in Nigeria, oil dependency in Saudi Arabia, labour exploitation in Ivory Coast coffee production, etc) while Chinese contributions tend to celebrate growing Chinese wealth, foreign direct investment, joint ventures, and huge government-led initiatives like the Belt Road Initiative. There is often a reluctance among Chinese students to draw attention to negative impacts of Chinese development post-1978 and internal politics are almost completely taboo, although controversial views may be aired in seminars. Students from Hong Kong or Taiwan are even more reticent and will not speak publicly about relations with mainland PRC. If Chinese contributions are controversial, it is in relation to Chinese economic power, manifesting a kind of push/pull, a positive with a caveat, for example in relation to the ASEAN-China trade agreement in 2010. Since 2013 the number of presentations from other countries has been inversely proportional to the balance of nationalities in the cohorts. This is a good thing given that most students already know quite a lot about China's economic power and its developing consumer economy; they learn about this in other modules too. They know far less, perhaps nothing, about Vietnam, Bahrain, or Mauritius. It is presentations about lesser powers or smaller states that add most value and demonstrate the reach and power of contemporary economic globalization.

Generalisation about 'Chinese learners', or any nationality group, risks cultural stereotyping (Watkins and Biggs 1996, 2001). Large cohorts contain highly diverse individuals with various learning styles, levels of assimilation with the host community, different degrees of immersion or social commitment to one's own compatriots. It is important to provide opportunities for students to express themselves: 'Thus, while 'the Chinese learners' may have certain identifiable characteristics, some of them related to culture, they may also learn and behave differently in different contexts, in ways related more to personal needs and situational demands' (Gu 2009). The activity described in this paper provides such an opportunity. Nevertheless, in many UK universities and especially in business and management schools there is a high proportion of PRC students, making reaching out beyond their own national group more difficult and less likely.

Many schools with large numbers of PRC students report that Chinese students tend to work and socialise primarily within their own national group, which is unsurprising and not a trait reserved for Chinese nationals. Many studies report difficulties for international students moving abroad to study, including language barriers (Agar 1996), culture shock (Adler 1985; Ward et al. 2001), education shock (Gu 2005, 2009). During the life of this initiative, some Chinese students have joined with non-Chinese to research and present on another country, but relatively few. The activity at least provides an opportunity for this to happen - and voluntarily, without coercion.

The module is relatively unusual in business and management degrees in that it is rooted in political science, with a critical take on the impact of Neoliberalism. It requires that core IPE concepts are established early in the module to sensitise students to the power relations involved in neoliberal economics and the policy preferences of elites, both private (e.g. corporations) and public (e.g. international governmental organisations [IGOs] such as the WTO) that are important in shaping and managing the global economy. This includes understanding how IGOs impact policy-making, while contemporary economic globalization privileges multinational corporations' access to new markets for goods and services and their exploitation of natural and human resources. These are challenging issues for students, many with a conventional business studies undergraduate background and often the typical multi-module, wide-ranging nature of a Chinese bachelor's degree, comprising modules such as English Language for Business, Introduction to Economic theory, Elementary Statistics, Military Theory, Basic Principles of Marxism, Maoist Ideology, International Business Etiquette, or Investment and Accounting.

The module *International Political Economy and Business* has evolved somewhat conventionally with a core textbook (Baylis et al. 2016) and a range of readings from books, journals and other sources, including film and documentary material as supplementary resources. The design and delivery of the module has sought to implement basic principles regarding student-centred learning, internationalizing the student experience, exploiting cultural capital by encouraging students to refer to their own countries and prior learning and experiences relating to their home communities. Essential benefits of the initiative are that it encourages student participation and broadens course content, bringing shared experience and knowledge. It provides opportunities for empathy between different communities' experience and reduces the proportion of western-centric course material (Phillipson 2010).

Early in the module students are alerted to the repository of student presentations on the VLP and invited to explore these. They are told of the opportunity to contribute new content. They are invited to deliver original material referring to a developing or newly industrialised country (NIC). This may be an individual effort, though group work is strongly encouraged. They may choose any aspect of globalization and its impact on an NIC. In practice the focus has been on international trade, power relationships and the impact of foreign direct investment (FDI). Students are encouraged to focus on their own country, or that of one of the presenting group. This allows for stronger personalisation of content and more emotional engagement, while it underlines the idea that students can refer to their own first-hand witness experience, their prior knowledge of what is familiar in their home city or region, but probably unknown to others. Where students are part of a group but the country in question is not their own, this adds to students learning from each other, working collaboratively and finding out about another place. Sometimes a group references more than one country, reflecting diversity within the group and allowing a comparative approach to different experiences and situations. Delivering work that relates to international students' own countries tallies with the notion of exploiting cultural capital within diverse student cohorts. It also enhances positive student engagement.

Students apply theories introduced during the module and relevant to their chosen context. Guidelines include a suggested fifteen-minute presentation, relevant support materials, supplementary reading, YouTube clips, or websites useful for students wanting to learn more about the issues raised. Each presentation is discussed with the module tutor, who gives formative feedback on content and design and advice on presenting technique. The group then practises before actual delivery in class. After the event students get further feedback before the work is uploaded to the VLP. Individuals are encouraged to use learning from this activity to inform their 3,000-word summative assessment, an essay with broad scope for referring to different countries or regions. The activity is therefore fully embedded in the module despite not being formally assessed. Student module evaluations show that the activity is greatly appreciated, sometimes referred to as a highlight in the learning experience.

The module documentation identifies various learning outcomes relating to academic and graduate skills, stating that by the end of the module students should be able to:

- Demonstrate a critical understanding of the assumptions which underpin key approaches in the field of IPE
- Identify and understand links between policy and recent developments in international trade, investment, money and finance
- Develop a sound understanding of policies adopted by key states in the international environment
- Demonstrate a critical understanding of the impact of globalization
- Evaluate and apply learned concepts and theories.

In addition, the exercise provides opportunities to practice and develop study skills, communication skills, practical use of information technology, social and political awareness. These attributes are identified by employers as deficient in graduates (Ennis-Reynolds 2001, 6) so this initiative helps to improve students' employability and satisfies the more instrumental aspects of SE referred to above.

A further feature of the initiative is that each presenting group is encouraged to elicit questions from the audience and to facilitate discussion of issues raised in the presentation. This can be challenging and may require the presenting group to ask the audience questions, referring to other contexts such as the impact of 'free trade' on employment, social upheaval, the effect of inward investment on local communities or the state itself. It is helpful to encourage a comparative approach between states, or identification of historical precedents. A significant tutor/facilitator role is therefore to guide the presenting groups towards eliciting contributions or questions from the audience. In practice this has been reasonably successful, indicating that the activity benefits group dynamics and student-centred learning.

The key stages of the activity within the 15 weeks module are summarised here:

- Weeks 1-4 Key IPE theoretical and institutional frameworks presented and discussed
- Week 2 The initiative introduced; students invited to form groups and to eventually contribute module content; previous contributions highlighted on VLP
- Weeks 3-5 Students form groups, discuss topics, plan contributions, prepare materials and design (PowerPoint) presentations
- Week 6 Module leader discusses contributions with groups or individuals, gives feedback and guidance, also on use of PowerPoint e.g. avoid gimmickry, reduce number of slides, include effective illustrations, web links. Edit slides, cut superfluous words, avoid information-heavy slides and long bullet-point lists. 'Short and Simple, Concise and Clear (SSCC)'
- Weeks 7-8 Student presentations included as part of 2-hour teaching sessions; Q&A/discussion after each 15' presentation
- Weeks 8-9 Feedback provided. Material uploaded to VLP
- Week 9 Students invited to refer to issues raised by their contributions in summative assessments (essays)
- Week 10 Formative assessment and feedback (based on essay outlines)
- Week 15 Essay submission deadline

ADAPTING OR ADOPTING THIS PRACTICE FOR OTHER DISCIPLINES

While the initiative described has featured in an IPE module in Masters courses in international business, the features and principles involved could be adapted for various modules at any level and certainly throughout the social sciences. In other areas too, the idea that students can contribute content and utilise prior learning and experience is surely evident. The practice requires us as practitioners and facilitators to have the confidence to invite students to use their initiative, make choices, suggest course topics and ultimately have more control. We can facilitate student contributions to course subject matter while overseeing and offering advice, feedback and encouragement. Ultimately, we judge the suitability of the material for uploading to the module VLP

and how long it stays there. This project has generated high quality work adding value to classes, benefiting group dynamics and improving the bank of course resources. Examples from five student presentations are shown (Figs.1-6).

The Caribbean

Countries

[Antigua and Barbuda](#)

[Bahamas](#)

[Barbados](#)

[Cuba](#)

[Dominica](#)

[Dominican Republic](#)

[Grenada](#)

[Haiti](#)

[Jamaica](#)

[St. Kitts and Nevis](#)

[St. Lucia](#)

[St. Vincent and the Grenadines](#)

[Trinidad and Tobago](#)

Territories & Dependencies

[Anguilla \(U.K.\)](#)

[Aruba \(Neth.\)](#)

[British Virgin Islands \(U.K.\)](#)

[Cayman Islands \(U.K.\)](#)

[Guadeloupe \(Fr.\)](#)

[Martinique \(Fr.\)](#)

[Montserrat \(U.K.\)](#)

[Netherlands Antilles \(Neth.\)](#)

[Puerto Rico \(U.S.\)](#)

[Turks and Caicos Islands \(U.K.\)](#)

[U.S. Virgin Islands](#)

28 countries , Population 36m of which 22 less than 1m

Strong ties with colonial powers (European).

GDP per capita range from \$1,200 to \$28,000

11



Fig.1 Presentation on Saint Lucia, the Caribbean and its place in the global economy

The Bahamas

Population: 330,000

GDP per capita: US\$ 28,000

Main economic drivers: Tourism - 48%

Financial services -10%

Real estate – 19%

No. of Islands – 700!!!



Fig. 2 Presentation on the the financial crisis and the Bahamas

Mauritius: the economy

1960s - 1970s

Low income agriculturally based economy

1980s onwards

Sugar exportation boom ended and Mauritius diversified to textile, tourism, financial and industrial sectors

Growth averages 4.6% compared to 2.9% of Sub-Saharan Africa



Fig. 3 Presentation on Mauritius and globalization



Fig. 4 Presentation on the oil industry in Nigeria

UNEP Environmental Assessment,
Ogoniland 2011



Fig. 5 Presentation on cocoa production in the Ivory Coast

Child labour and cocoa – despite official working age of 18, much farming work carried out by children in order to cover a minimum standard of living. Some are enslaved by overseers who beat them if they try to escape. Many come from Mali.

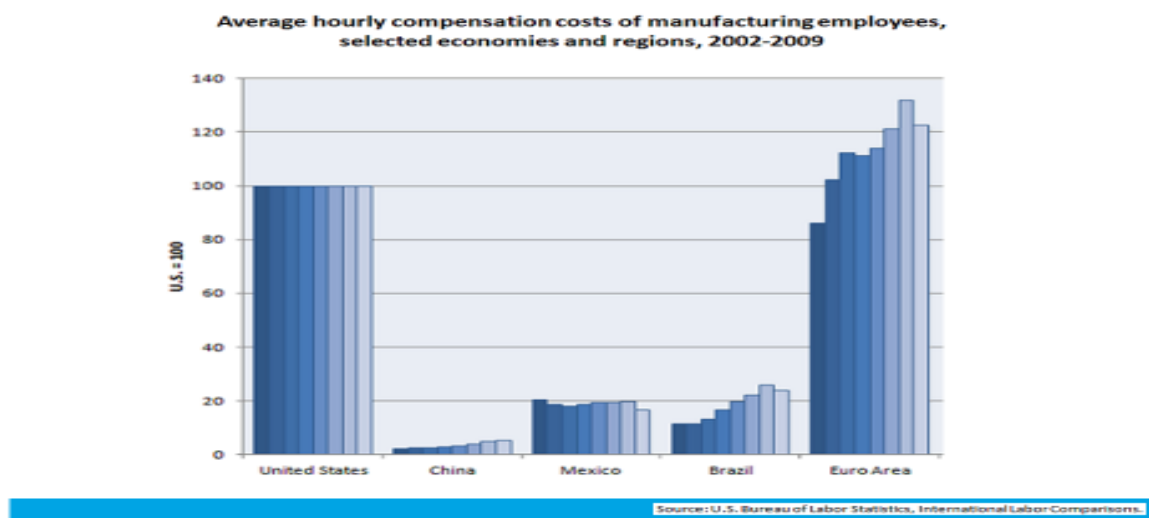
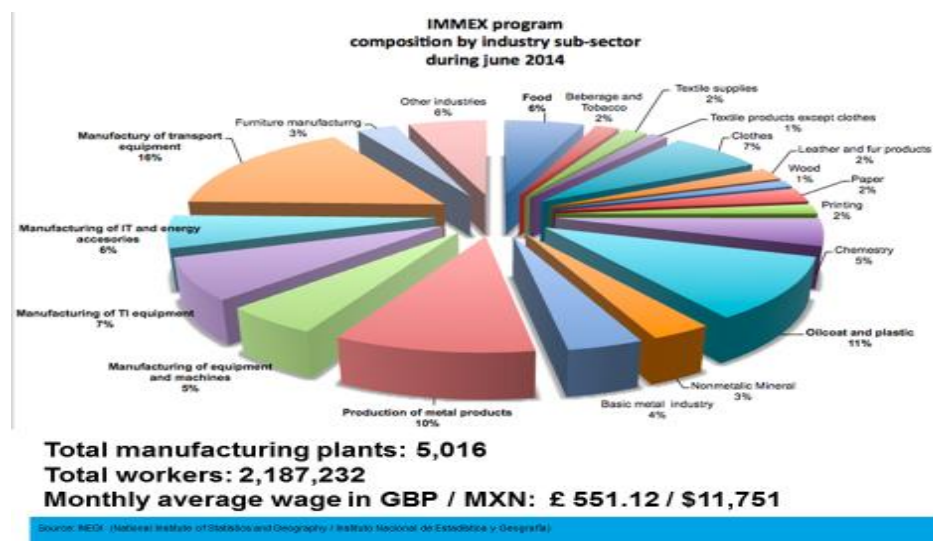


Fig. 6 Presentation on Maquiladoras in Mexico

The activity clearly benefits from the opportunities provided by a relatively diverse student cohort, albeit with a high proportion of PRC nationals. The reality in many universities and a consequence of increased wealth and better access to higher education, is that many courses now have quite diverse student populations, especially in English-speaking countries or where the medium of instruction is English. Even if this is not the case in terms of national provenance the activity can still focus on students' prior learning, family experience, city experience, or different urban/rural backgrounds. There is always diversity of some kind in any cohort. Another variation is for students to research a different country experience, even if it is *not* their own. Admittedly this is likely to reduce, but not eliminate, the potential for cognitive-emotional engagement. A further potential adaptation is for students to base part of their research on interviewing nationals from another country about their experiences or knowledge of their country. A study highlighted the importance of internationalisation in 23 of 26 countries under analysis with Australia, Germany, Malaysia, the UK and China being the most open to encouraging student mobility, both inward and outward (University of Oxford 2017). Others are scrambling to catch up, while in Ireland, France and the Netherlands some HEIs have high numbers of mobile students. The same report says over a fifth of students at UK universities are international (ibid, 14), with a high proportion on postgraduate programmes.

CONCLUSION

This paper has described the theory and practice underpinning a project involving student-designed presentations and support materials that constitute direct student input into course content and module resources. The theoretical underpinning of the initiative has been discussed, the context and mechanics of the activity described and discussion of how similar activities could be integrated into a range of disciplines.

The initiative has proved popular with students, both those who have volunteered to be 'providers', designing and delivering presentations and also those preferring to be audience for their peers' efforts. Student feedback indicates a positive experience for both sides. Students welcome the change of focus, the inclusivity and the putting into practice of a key principle that there are as many teachers and as many learners in the room as there are people. We can all learn and contribute to the teaching and learning process. As well as students learning from each other and exercising some autonomy over course content, the initiative has brought fresh perspectives, new geographical settings and new histories that would otherwise not gain the visibility that this practice makes possible.

The project has provided significant resources to the module, broadening the geographical coverage and the range of topics. Countries represented include the Bahamas, Bahrain, Brazil, China, Colombia, Greece, India, Ivory Coast, Mauritius, Mexico, Myanmar, Nigeria, Romania, Saudi Arabia, St Lucia and Vietnam. These countries illustrate a range of impacts from Neoliberalism and other globalization trends including environmental, social and employment factors and dramatic internal change. They underline how globalization has shaped countries' fundamental social, political and economic experience. This offers a close fit with the IPE concepts studied in the module.

Students benefit from the initiative in many ways. This is student-centred learning in practice; it is substantially student-directed; it offers clear opportunities for autonomous research. It also fosters collaborative efforts among a diverse cohort and broadens students' understanding of other countries, highlighting common as well as contrasting experiences. The presenters themselves are engaged in a specific task that is student-designed and student-led, which has important motivational benefits. Team working, time management, communication skills, negotiation, respect

and mutual support, are all features of the activity. Preparing and giving a formal presentation is a key learning experience. It provides a skills development exercise that maps into key skills and learning outcomes for both the module and the degree programme. It fits with the university's expectations regarding pedagogical practice and chimes with the need to enhance graduate employability.

The activity is voluntary and essentially cooperative, so there is less pressure than if formal assessment were involved. Students are encouraged to remember their contribution to the module and refer to it in future or reflect on it as a highlight in their studies. They may enjoy having contributed directly to module resources; they may ask for a reference from the module leader who will mention the student's achievement in positive terms. As well as key skills, the initiative delivers on employability imperatives. Perhaps the core benefit from the activity however is that it extolls the value of cultural capital in diverse student cohorts and generates educational capital through a learner-centred and inclusive approach to building module content.

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ENDNOTES

¹ The author served on the UK British Council/Socrates Erasmus Bologna Experts Committee between 2006-2013. Bologna Experts, sponsored by the European Commission, worked to promote the principles and practice of the Bologna process that established the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) with 48 signatory states.

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