Purposeful interaction in project education at University College Groningen: a case study of the international classroom in practice

Kevin Haines, International Classroom Project, University of Groningen, April 2017

Executive Summary

This report provides a detailed overview of an investigation into purposeful interaction in the international classroom as exemplified by the project education in the first year of University College Groningen (UCG). This investigation has been carried out in line with the proposal for the International Classroom (IC) project at UCG, and it continues the IC project approach of reporting good practices through pilots and case studies (see references).

The UCG environment has provided rich evidence of the use of diversity as a resource in project education. This diversity in both academic staff and students results in dynamic interactions through which students develop important academic and life skills. To some extent, this development is also supported at UCG by skills workshops, although the impact of these workshops needs further investigation.

The report explains that project education in the first year at UCG is currently being re-designed and therefore cannot yet have reached its full potential for teaching and learning. Recommendations are made for further development so that the potential of this environment as an 'international classroom' can be realized and 'purposeful interaction' can be achieved more consistently. This involves aligning activities more explicitly with the evidence-based principles for good practice described in literature (Carroll 2015; Leask 2015), and building a more explicit UCG interpretation of these principles in practice.

In particular:

  - international and intercultural learning outcomes should be more thoroughly described and embedded in the educational design;

  - greater emphasis should be placed on understanding the ways in which the student body is heterogeneous on the one hand and homogeneous on the other hand, so that this understanding can be used constructively in the teaching and learning;

  - more explicit use should be made of the diversity in the interdisciplinary team of project supervisors (academic staff), meaning that structures need to be provided for further team-building and continuing professional development.

Acknowledgments

1. Background

One of the key observations to emerge from pilot studies of 'good practices' at University of Groningen (2013-2015) has been the importance of creating sites for learning through designed 'purposeful interaction' (Haines 2017). Examples of such interaction at the *International Bachelor's in Medicine Groningen* (IBMG) and *Industrial Engineering & Management* (IEM) are described in reports of earlier IC project pilots (University of Groningen 2014; University of Groningen 2015), resulting in a working model for purposeful Interaction (figure 1).
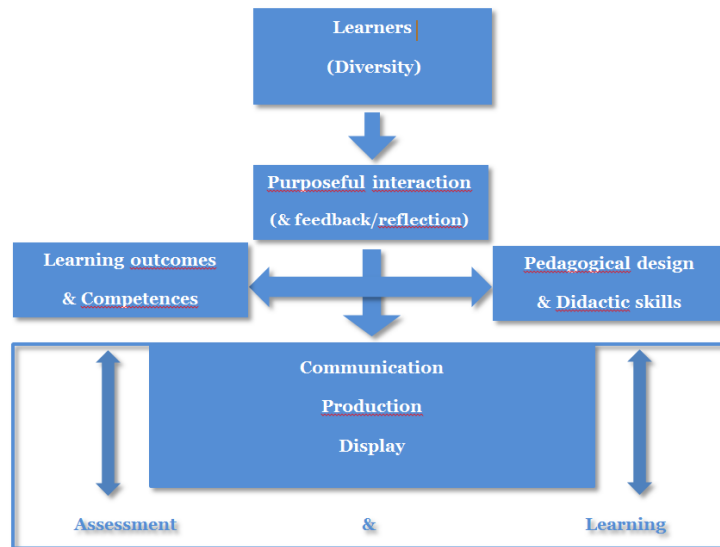

Figure 1: Purposeful interaction: a working model (Haines 2017: 44)

The above model can be used to help content teachers investigate ways of using interactive methods to get full value out of the diversity in their teaching and learning contexts (their 'classrooms').

> *"…the content teachers should be encouraged … to make local interpretations of the model that are meaningful to them and their colleagues. This involves them thinking about the extent of the diversity in the groups they teach. They also need to know whether the intended learning outcomes of the programme have already been adjusted to incorporate meaningful international and intercultural dimensions, and whether they need to define specific moments in which to incorporate such learning outcomes at course level in order to supplement more generic learning outcomes at programme level."*
> (Haines 2017: 54)

The precise nature of the elements and the way they are combined depends on the local educational context and also to a large extent on the culture of the academic discipline(s) being studied. However, the elements contained in this model are recognizable across interactive learning settings in higher education, and they are also evident in descriptions of the Internationalisation of the Curriculum in Higher Education (Carroll 2015; Leask 2015). For example, Carroll (2015) describes what to look for (or design into) programmes that foster dialogue and interaction:

> *"Interaction is planned into courses, projects and assessment as a normal learning tool – and seen as one requiring support."* (Carroll 2015: 116)

The redesign of the first year project education at University College Groningen (UCG) during 2016-2017 has been an opportunity to investigate such a site of interaction in higher education from 'the inside out', looking at the role and impact of diversity in the learning process in the international classroom. This report discusses the experiences of five project supervisors at UCG, including the project education coordinator. These project supervisors are members of the academic staff who also teach subjects across a wide variety of academic disciplines. They are part of a larger team of ten first year project supervisors.

This case study has consisted of the following steps:

1. A meeting of all project supervisors in November 2016 with the IC curriculum designer (Kevin Haines, hereafter KH) to discuss the aim of the case study and some of the main issues related to the international classroom (for a summary, see appendix 1), also referring to the 'good practice principles for redesigning programmes to incorporate an international dimension' (Carroll 2015; Leask 2015).
2. The five project supervisors participating in this case study were asked to produce 'logbooks' or similar written reflections, in which they considered the main features of the international classroom as experienced in the first year project groups at UCG. They were given guiding questions as a point of reference (see appendix 2). The aim was to encourage the project supervisors to reflect explicitly on the international classroom aspect of the project education, and to give KH some first impressions of their hands-on experiences.
3. KH attended project group sessions with the project groups of the five participating project supervisors in order to further familiarise himself with the project design and content.
    (KH is a former member of staff at UCG with knowledge of the learning environment. KH is also familiar with this first year student cohort, having delivered workshops on *International Classroom & Intercultural Awareness* to all first year students in December 2016.)
4. KH carried out semi-structured interviews with the five project supervisors in February 2017, discussing their teaching experiences in project education at UCG in relation to the international classroom, diversity, and key elements of purposeful interaction (see appendix 3). The interviews demonstrate issues and dilemmas that arise in this environment and also provide insights into diversity in international classrooms as experienced by these teachers.
5. Project supervisors responded with cases exemplifying their perspective on diversity in the international classroom at UCG.
6. During a final meeting with KH and the participating project supervisors in April 2017, a draft version of this report was revised and some recommendations were formulated.

As a small-scale learning environment, with a cohort of approximately 80 students, UCG lends itself to a case study of this type (see section 2 for a contextual description). This case study will inform further investigations in larger educational settings such as the Faculty of Economics & Business in 2017-2018. For this reason, a summary of this report will be made available to IC projects at other faculties. The summary will be written by the contact person at UCG in consultation with KH.

2.   The context: Project education at University College Groningen 2016-2017 (1st Year)

University College Groningen (UCG) is a Liberal Arts and Sciences faculty of the University of Groningen, offering an interdisciplinary undergraduate programme, based on small-scale education and involving a high degree of interaction in small groups. The project education at UCG is a dynamic teaching and learning process that lies at the heart of the UCG teaching and learning environment, accounting for 10 ECTS per year.

In the academic year 2016-2017, project education in the first year has been re-designed so that groups of students undertake projects under the umbrella heading *Skills & Projects: Creating Horizon: Project II* (the subject of this case study). They do this in several stages alongside their other classes throughout blocks 2, 3 and 4, having undertaken an introductory project, *Exploring Challenges of Modern Society* in block 1. This project (*Project II*) aims to challenge team members to understand a complex social problem and apply methods and skills to the development of recommendations for change. Each group of approximately 15 students has chosen a specific topic representing a 'global challenge'; for instance, 'how we can change ourselves via genetics to tackle these global challenges?'.

During these projects, students are expected to produce several pieces of work in smaller groups of approximately 5 students, each of which contributes to the overall understanding of the topic the group of 15 has chosen. This process starts in block 2 with the production of scenarios, and continues with the writing and redrafting of a 'white paper', a presentation on the scenario-based method, and finally a presentation of findings and recommendations to an invited audience at the end of block 4.

Project titles in 2016-2017 include *Designer Humans*, *Energy Transitions*, *Deep Time, Neighbourhood Priorities, DIY Health* and *The Refugee Project*. Students are given quite some freedom in the interpretation and design of their projects so that they can align their project work with their interests. Nevertheless, all the projects are situated within the broad areas of University of Groningen's strategic research orientation on societal themes: Energy, Healthy Ageing and the Sustainable Society. See http://www.rug.nl/research/societal-themes/

This longitudinal approach to this project work is supported by a Project Education Coordinator and a team of Project Supervisors consisting of academic staff from various disciplines. Experience at other faculties confirms the need for close guidance of the learning process from these project supervisors given that the students are in the first year of their Bachelor's programme:

> "… first year Bachelor's students are novices in the academic arena and are not able to judge the reasons for their confusion when confronted with authentic academic materials that are beyond their capabilities. This can lead to uncertainty and tensions in student groups. (Haines 2017: 52)

Given that these students are novices in higher education and that they come from a variety of educational backgrounds, it is important that this project work is supported by the provision of workshops to enhance the skills required to function in project work and in groups. These workshops focus, for example, on the *International Classroom & Intercultural Awareness*, *Scenario Building, Critical Literacy, Teambuilding* and *The Language of Presentations.*

3.   Purposeful interaction in the project groups at UCG

In the following sections, project education at UCG is discussed with reference to the key elements in the purposeful interaction model, namely diversity, learning outcomes and pedagogy, the latter including the didactic skills applied by the teachers. Citations from the interviews with the project supervisors are embedded wherever appropriate (in italics). The discussion cannot cover assessment and evaluation as it is too early to draw conclusions in these areas; not only is the project education 'in progress' until the end of Block 4 but it is also being run for the first time in its current design.

3.1   Diversity

One of the central ideas behind the international classroom project is that diversity is a potential asset that can, if used appropriately, be used as a resource in the learning and teaching. For this to occur, it is necessary to understand the diversity that is present in the learning environment, including both student and staff diversity. It is necessary to be explicit about the way this diversity is used, in which ways it can be considered an asset, and how it contributes to learning.

If we start by describing diversity based on nationality and gender, the first year student cohort at UCG in 2016-2017 ('Class of 2019') looks like this:

Albania:	1
Austria:	2
Bangladesh:	1
China:	2
France:	1
Germany:	11
Greece:	1
Ireland:	3
Italy:	9
Latvia:	1
Macedonia:	1
Netherlands:	35
Norway:	1
Poland:	2
Romania:	2
South Africa:	1
Switzerland:	1
Sweden:	1
Vietnam:	1
UK:	3
US:	3
Total:	**84 students (female 54, male 30)**

[N.B. Some students have dual nationalities, but only the Dutch passport is recorded here; so, for example, a Canadian and a New Zealander with Dutch heritage are not included in this list.]

One project supervisor at UCG has described diversity in the student body in the 1st year cohort (2016-2017) as '60-60', meaning 60% international and 60% Dutch. This emphasizes that many Dutch students are also 'international' and that passports, taken on their own, are an unreliable indicator of

diversity. This also resonates with the idea that the UCG programme attracts a certain proportion of so-called 'Third Culture Kids' who have grown up outside the cultures of their parents and/or the nationalities stated on their passport. As these students are already somewhat adapted through their prior 'international' secondary education to the kind of active learning environment at UCG, it may be assumed that they have an advantage early on in the first year programme. However, this perceived advantage may also present difficulties as the expectations of 'international' higher education at UCG will differ to those of 'international' secondary education such as the *International Baccalaureate*. This would need further investigation.

In terms of nationality, this third cohort of students is the most diverse that UCG has had. This implies that there should be quite an opportunity to build on a variety of backgrounds and perspectives. Nevertheless, project supervisors make the point that in terms of age and social class the students have much in common, and this homogeneity represents a challenge to the idea of using diversity as a resource [N.B. quotes in italics below are taken from the interviews with project supervisors unless otherwise stated].

> *"I am less struck by their differences than by their homogeneity."*

Also, according to the project supervisors, ethnic cultures are not the only category that should be considered when describing diversity:

> *"I really don't know how much culture plays a role here. I think it is more like personality traits or characteristics although this is also embedded in a certain culture somehow."*

> *"We have a really diverse classroom because of the different nationalities, gender differences and disciplinary differences, and also different personalities which result in different approaches to the collaboration."*

> *"Of all the demographic categories, class is the one that screams out."*

It is also important to recognize the diversity in the academic staff, noting that the five participants originate in five different countries and they have a variety of disciplinary backgrounds. However, students may not recognize or value this diversity.

> *"The students could make more use of the different backgrounds of the staff. But I do not think the students are that aware of the potential in the backgrounds of the staff."*

It is important to bear in mind that in terms of professional identities, the supervisors also have much in common, for example, in terms of their educational backgrounds. Despite these similarities, their disciplinary backgrounds diverge, and this may be seen as a larger factor when discussing the diversity in their teaching styles (see below). Furthermore, while some of the project supervisors have been in the Netherlands for some time, several supervisors have recently moved to the Netherlands, resulting in diversity in terms of the perspectives they bring to the project.

For this case study, it is especially interesting to observe from the interviews that the supervisors look at diversity from different angles, and that they generally do not see the national cultures of the students as the defining element of this diversity.

3.2　Learning Outcomes and Competences

For the academic year 2016-2017, UCG has drafted a number of learning outcomes for the core programme (see the draft version in appendix 4). *Outcome 11* makes specific reference to the international and intercultural element, while also recognizing that the element is somehow embedded in all the other outcomes. This learning outcome effectively represents a 'statement of intent' but it is not yet explicitly or structurally embedded in the project education.

> *"The student is able to … perform all of the above in situations where there is cultural diversity, demonstrating the ability to overcome difficulties caused by cultural diversity and the ability to make use of the international community in a positive way."*

> Draft of learning outcomes for the core programme at UCG (version 16/10/16)

The other learning outcomes are all of relevance to the work in these project groups. What needs to be clarified is how they will be assessed in relation to outcome 11. Also, this will depend on interpretations, which in themselves may be value-laden. For example, Outcome 1 describes *Collaboration*, which is clearly an essential feature in these small project groups. Students should be able to "demonstrate leadership and effective participation in group work". The project supervisors recognize the importance of collaboration as a UCG learning outcome:

> *"Effective collaboration is one of the highly promoted learning outcomes at UCG. We believe that collaboration can be achieved through working in diverse teams."*

But we have already seen in section 3.1 how one of the project supervisors values the "different approaches to collaboration", so are there recognized norms regarding what constitutes collaboration at UCG, and what role do these norms (if they exist) play in the assessment of student performance in the projects? Also, we need to consider whether there is a shared and explicit understanding of what constitutes "effective participation''. To assess this again involves making potentially value-laden judgements.

Even though the project supervisors recognize the value of certain learning outcomes, it is not yet explicit how they are operationalized in the teaching, learning and assessment of that learning - or how they will be operationalized in future. For instance, one of the project supervisors makes the point that 'tolerance' can be considered a very valuable learning outcome.

> *"Learning tolerance is really important, and it's a very good way to overcome difficulties caused by cultural diversity."*

But how is this 'tolerance' to be operationalized as a learning outcome, and how could it be assessed?

The model of 'purposeful interaction' also focuses on 'communication, production and display' in the learning processes in these groups. This process is represented in the draft learning outcomes in Outcome 10, *Communication*.

> *"The student is able to … convey findings effectively, choosing a format which is appropriate to the project and the audience. Communicate to a high standard in oral, visual, written and creative presentation formats."*

Draft of learning outcomes for the core programme at UCG (version 16/10/16)

In the UCG project groups, learning takes place through activity, whether this involves the production of questions for use when interviewing an expert or the production of props for use in a film (two of the tasks observed at UCG). At a fundamental level, students need the language ability to ensure they can communicate both within their project group and with other audiences. This language ability is apparently not guaranteed for all students at UCG, with the result that there are students in the programme who are disadvantaged through limitations in their active proficiency in English.

> *"UCG does not test their spoken English. I think that should be an entrance requirement. Either the language skills are poor or they are just plain shy?"*

Also, where limitations in language prevent participation, students do not achieve what is expected of them in terms of collaboration, and this affects the learning of other students. The achievement of one learning outcome is affected negatively by limitations in another.

> *"We have a guy who has language problems. He doesn't say anything and is not collaborating."*

Students also need to experience how knowledge might be understood differently when it crosses cultural boundaries.

> *"I try to give people the room to explore concepts by using their own cultural context. There is a kind of learning that comes about through exposure to other cultures."*

These learning outcomes will be refined (hence the use of *draft*) as the project education is evaluated and redesigned on the basis of this year's experiences. This is an opportunity to further integrate the intercultural and international element into the other outcomes.

3.3   Pedagogy and teaching styles

The project supervisors are given a high degree of freedom at UCG in how they run their project groups. Furthermore, the students are given a choice of topics so that they can "work on a topic which they find interesting" (project supervisor). This produces a dynamic environment in which many different set-ups occur, and space in the learning environment is used flexibly as the work is not confined to the assigned project rooms. Depending on the task, the interaction and the roles of the students in their groups may change considerably from week to week.

Four examples follow [taken from observations of the project groups in action].

> In one session, experts were being interviewed about a complex scientific topic. The session took on a formal aspect, with designated students asking the questions, the experts sitting behind a table and the rest of the students forming an audience. The session was also filmed by the students. The experts had a certain authority, and they were addressed in quite a formal manner by the students. Two supervisors were present at the session but they needed to do very little apart from ensure that technical support was available for the filming. The preparation work for this session had been done in previous sessions.

In a second session, students were producing a short movie. Students moved around the whole building, making use of the resources available for props and locations for filming. They even recruited students from other years to take part in their filming. There was a high level of creativity and relatively little hands-on 'control' from the supervisor. Students 'checked in' with the supervisor on an *ad hoc* basis and were provided with feedback and advice on their work. Students could display their work to their supervisor in the form of the short unedited films.

In a third session, sub-groups were presenting their initial work to two supervisors. The supervisors formed a 'panel' behind a table, asking questions and providing some feedback on what was being presented. Students had produced slides with information about their projects. While one sub-group presented, other groups continued to work on their own presentations. There was a mix of the formal with the informal, the structured and the unstructured in the same room.

In a fourth session, the students worked in their sub-groups. The supervisor was available in the room, answering questions and providing feedback when requested. There was an informal atmosphere, which could best be described as a 'production space'. There was the sense of students producing their own learning space and the supervisor flexibly facilitating their use of this space.

The variety of types of interaction described above is potentially a tremendous asset and potentially a source of uncertainty for students. The shifting roles of the students and their supervisors creates the potential for confusion if the process is not managed skillfully or if it is not explained carefully. Teachers and students need to be on the same page in terms of expectations regarding the activities and the goals, and students also need to understand why a teacher is teaching them in a certain way.

> *"Different teaching approaches is fine, but I don't know how that works with one individual teacher. I tried lecturing and they hated it and I hated it. The difference with me teaching them in different styles was that it was still me, the same person having a different persona. It was weird for them and weird for myself."*

The project supervisors are themselves grappling with their roles and becoming familiar with both the aims of the project and the needs of the diverse group of students. The project supervisors also indicate the need for more opportunities to share and discuss their experiences with each other.

> *"Teambuilding is important for the teachers. It's a missed opportunity that we don't do that – [it could be] just some fun things that we can share with each other. Right now the only people I share things with are the people in my office or the people I go to lunch with."*

Meanwhile, it is possible that students reflect more explicitly on their learning experiences in their reflective assignments, but these assignments are read by their mentor and so the project supervisor may not easily grasp the needs of students at the moment that the needs occur i.e. in the middle of the activity. Therefore, they may find it difficult to know when or how to intervene. Some of the project supervisors talked about their struggles in this respect.

> *"That subgroup is really begging me to sit down with them every time they meet so that I can be the facilitator. I do that as much as possible, but the second solution was asking one of the guys to be the 'bridge'. I asked him to take the initiative and he can do that very well."*

It would seem that skillful 'intervention' like this is fundamental to the role of the project supervisor: non-intervention may lead to hours of fruitless labour for students who are heading down a blind alley, whereas a too hasty intervention may undermine the challenge that lies at the heart of the activity. Also, supervisors need to take into account the stage that students are at in the learning process:

> *"For the first year students when they first come we have to be a bit more understanding, or we have to change the design, find some roles for them in which they feel comfortable."*

There is a sense that the way the groups work differ considerably partly depending on the task (as shown above) but also depending on the preferred teaching style and personality of the project supervisor. For example:

> *"There are students who are good at knowing that you're allowed to be wrong. The way I do it is first to solicit feedback from students and then once they have had their say I will mention anything that hasn't been brought up. I will mention it in a Socratic way. Constructive criticism gives them a way out. It shows them a direction by which they can improve."*

Feedback therefore also takes place in different ways in different groups, and the provision of feedback during the group work relies heavily on the skillful intuitive intervention of the supervisor.

Nevertheless, despite these issues, much is being achieved, and it is clear that there will be an element of uncertainty in a learning process that seeks to address such complex issues through projects.

> *"Our aim is to look through a diverse lens to consider problems in all their complexity – you have to be open to all possibilities."*

The challenge, addressed in the cases in the following section, is to manage the uncertainty in such a way that it is recognizable to project supervisors as a necessary element in the learning process. This means that project supervisors are prepared to accept a level of uncertainty and work with this in the knowledge that this uncertainty can lead to moments of breakthrough and transition (see section 4.1 below). For project supervisors, this is a tricky business as their credibility as teachers across the curriculum is also at stake in their performance with their project groups. A misfiring project may affect the way students respond to them as teachers in other contexts; this may affect learning processes in their classes and ultimately affect evaluations of their performance. It is therefore of the utmost importance that there is a structural culture of peer support amongst project supervisors so that they can allow their project groups (and themselves) to take risks in the project education in the knowledge that they can depend on the support of colleagues when necessary. Teamwork and an open exchange of experiences between project supervisors would seem to be of the essence.

> *"I want to see team-work. One person shouldn't be in this alone. It becomes rich with more people from different backgrounds and with different expertise."*

4.   Aligning the observations with the principles

While recognizing the value of unraveling the teaching and learning experiences 'from the inside out', some of the project supervisors have mentioned the need to have firmer points of reference. For this purpose, the next step is to align the observations above on designing purposeful interaction with the 'good practice principles for redesigning programmes to incorporate an international dimension' described by Carroll (2015) and Leask (2015).

> *1: Focus on students as learners [in transition]*
>
> *2: Respect and adjust for diversity*
>
> *3: Provide context-specific information and support [manage expectations]*
>
> *4: Enable meaningful intercultural dialogue and engagement [through interaction]*

In the sections below, some of these principles are illustrated with cases provided by the project supervisors, providing evidence of good practices that are already in place at UCG and which could be used as reference points for the discussion of future developments.

4.1   Focus on students as learners [in transition]

The following extracts are taken from a longer case in which the project supervisor considers the role of 'gender' when thinking about the diversity in her project group.

> *"The category that actually divided people and made it difficult for me to work with them was gender".*

In Case 4.1 below, she describes breakthroughs in a group that she saw in the beginning as 'non-functioning'. The group consisted of two female students and two male students.

Case 4.1: Breakthroughs and transitions

Breakthrough 1:
Only Boy 1 and Girl 1 showed up in this meeting. Girl 2 informed us that she was not going to join. Boy 2 just did not show up. I don't think that Boy 1 was happy to begin with but since they had to do it, they did it, they started to work together. The two of them ended up working amazingly well. I joined them too for prolonged periods of time to help them reshape their research question. I had a chance to more closely observe their interaction then. It seemed to me that they very naturally assumed the roles they were most comfortable with. Girl 1 was in charge of registering their thoughts on the blackboard. She seemed to love doing this. But she also got to speak way more [than usual], she voiced her opinion a couple of times, and she was very meticulous about note keeping. It was the first time I saw her being so involved with the project. The boy too got gradually more into it. He was the one in charge of the thinking process. He was mostly sat while the girl was standing keeping notes, and he was sort of thinking out loud and the girl was putting down his thoughts. This arrangement worked out for them. They achieved a very significant breakthrough in that 2 hour slot.

Breakthrough 2:
On this day sub-groups had to deliver presentations on their research question and how they would go about finding answers to it (epistemological approach, methods, tools). Boy 1 and the two girls showed up for the group presentation. Boy 2 called in sick. The group delivered a truly VERY good presentation. I was very surprised. I did not hide my happiness or my surprise. I went and asked them what happened, how they had achieved this remarkable outcome while feeling so lost a week earlier. Girl 2 told me in a very happy tone that she invited everyone to her kitchen, she cooked, and they got to work on the presentation together. She said they worked really well in that setting and that they had a good time. She also said they would repeat it. Girl 1, who almost never talks, was very happy too, and Boy 1 was reasonably happy but quite obviously content.

The project supervisor defines two phases that were apparently necessary to the learning process. The earlier phase was categorised by uncertainty and a number of failures, which led her to conclude that the group was non-functional. At this stage she considered that the differences in the group, in particular gender-based differences, were more salient. In the context of a failing group dynamic, the girls and boys sat separately, for instance, and the boys retreated into a comfort zone in which they were playful and boisterous while the girls retreated into a kind of resentful silence.

In the second phase, however, as described above, the students found ways of stepping outside their comfort zones, crossing the previous gender-related boundaries and discovering ways of working that led to resolutions. The inference is that it takes time for these young learners to adjust and to find the spaces (both physical and psychological) in which they can function. They are young people in a new environment and it should not be assumed that they will be able to function appropriately from the beginning. It is also worth mentioning that this process was challenging for the supervisor, who needed to try several interventions before the students reached the second phase; in other words, the road to the students' success was highly 'facilitated', it didn't just 'happen'.

Another project supervisor also described the transition that students go through, and their need for support in the following way:

> "I assume that students coming to UCG know this [project work] is going to happen. So students should be ready to change. Maybe they want to change, but it's not going to be easy."

4.2   Respect and adjust for diversity

In this case, the project supervisor recognized that certain students were quieter than others and less participative in the large group setting (see Case 4.2). She put this down to personality (introversion), because she could see that they were producing 'good scenarios'.

Case 4.2: The "quiet" students

One group was formed with "quiet" students who didn't participate in the discussion during the brainstorming session. For a follow-up meeting, I wanted to have discussions with each team separately to discuss their selected topic in detail. This would also give me the chance to hear every individual. Later in the block, we had meetings with all teams in which they presented their progress on scenario building. I asked all teams to give feedback to all presentations. However, the "quiet" team was still not participating.

Despite their lack of participation and showing enthusiasm in the large group setting, the "quiet" team could work together and produce good scenarios. At the end of the block, another project supervisor and I had meetings with each student individually. My intention was to see the individual contributions to the whole process. I could easily see how each student can be different during one-to-one contact moments. The white paper also gave me more insight into the members of the "quiet" team. The texts of some of these students were well-written.

The project supervisor realized that extroverted behaviour is highly valued in the projects.

> *"We find it difficult to accept the students how they are and do not provide an environment suitable for introverted students. I do not suggest having only individual study and excluding introverts from group work. On the contrary, I believe that introverts should be challenged to leave their comfort zone from time to time. What I propose is that as supervisors we should be careful in the design process of the projects and assessment methods."*

By varying the design to give students one-to-one moments, the project supervisor was able to provide space for these 'quieter' students to express themselves. She argues for a learning environment that is designed to cater for a diversity of personality types.

4.3   Enable meaningful intercultural dialogue and engagement [interaction]

'Purposeful interaction' and 'meaningful dialogue' across cultures lie at the heart of course design in the international classroom. It is essential that this interaction is 'intentional' and designed in such a way that students are enabled to demonstrate (provide evidence) what they have learned, both to the teacher and to fellow students. This enables students to receive feedback and, when appropriate, to be assessed.

The following example gives an insight into an exercise that allows students to exchange knowledge 'across borders' in the shape of myths. The project supervisor explains that the knowledge related to the myths chosen by students is very often 'unmoored', in the following sense:

> *The vast majority of myths chosen were part of what you might call the general cultural inheritance of the West: Santa Claus, Judeo-Christian mythology, Icarus and Daedelus, etc. Whilst all of those myths have a sort of sense of place, at least in a general sense (North Pole, the Near East, the Greek Islands, etc), knowing and understanding the myth requires no real*

phenomenological engagement with the place in which the myth is purportedly located; this is what I mean by saying that these myths are 'unmoored from space'.

However, certain myths may engage the students in a more fundamental cultural exchange, and may therefore contribute to 'meaningful intercultural dialogue', as in Case 4.4 (below).

Case 4.3: myths and baggage

With respect to the case studies, one student with an ethnic background that is unique at UCG integrated the received information with her ethno-cultural inheritance. Asked to find and communicate examples of myths that have been both resistant to time and tied to a specific location, she was able to propose the most apt story amongst the cohort. The majority of the cohort, meanwhile, decided to go with more mainstream examples. Unfortunately, these examples were unmoored from place, which was a key aspect of the assignment. In the case of the girl I mentioned I didn't intervene at all! It was decided entirely within the group.

In another instance a white Dutch student was shocked to find that a non-white student had strong negative feelings about Zwarte Piet, given the historic association with minstrel shows and blackface. Given that the myth being tackled was that of Santa Claus/Sinterklaas, the students were forced to render a decision about which version of the myth to pursue, eventually settling on the version without the racial baggage.

In this case, the design may achieve two goals related to the international classroom:

a) The exercise allows a minority student to share part of her cultural heritage with other students, giving diversity a role in the assignment without reducing it to 'exoticism'.
b) The exercise brings to the surface cultural baggage and provides an educational platform for the discussion and negotiation of this cultural baggage, without forcing a (win/lose) resolution.

The minority student's myth constituted a meaningful learning experience because it required a tacit, perceptual, and bodily understanding of the local geography (and local conditions more generally) in order for the story to function. Moreover, this relation to space is entirely necessary; it could not be told anywhere else in the world. The myth therefore takes the other students to 'places' they would not have been if the minority student had not been present, challenging their existing knowledge in a way that the 'unmoored' myths would not. The Dutch student in the Sinterklaas case was confronted with his own assumptions when discovering that a student from a significantly different background did not share his values. He was invited to reconsider a fundamental aspect of his upbringing from an 'outsider' perspective.

These experiences can contribute to students' understanding of themselves and their cultural baggage in relation to other students from other cultures. This understanding of the value of

intercultural awareness comes close to the description in Learning Outcome 11 (see appendix 4) of "the ability to make use of the resource of international community in a positive way".

4.4 Provide context-specific information and support [expectations]

Carroll (2015) emphasises the need to be explicit regarding the expectations of students from diverse backgrounds. One aspect that needs further investigation at UCG is the need to provide 'systematic training in cross-cultural communication prior to the requirement to work in cross-cultural groups' (Carroll 2015: 115). To unwrap this particular need, the student perspective would need investigating in further detail (see recommendations).

At UCG, an additional contextual factor is the fact that students live and learn within a tight and self-contained learning community. Given that UCG students not only study together but also live together (at Frascati), it is not surprising that they tend to remain in a comfort zone or 'bubble' or retreat into this zone at times of uncertainty or difficulty. Several of the project supervisors have mentioned this phenomenon and discussed the interventions that are necessary in order to bring students into contact with the outside world and the diversity 'out there'. Put simply, it is difficult for these novice first year students to make external connections without intervention, facilitation or 'scaffolding' from their supervisors.

One example of such an intervention is a project supervisor who chose to act as an intermediary between the students and the experts that they needed to invite to their meeting. In a second example, a project supervisor of a group of students carrying out research which involved collecting the perspectives of 'townspeople' discovered that the students were not able to make connections with these 'townspeople'. Furthermore, the non-Dutch students explained how reliant they are on the networks of the 'local' Dutch students in making such connections, which limits their agency and can affect their confidence, motivation and development.

A third example deals with the issue that many UCG students come from similar socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds and may therefore find it confronting to work in projects in a diverse community outside UCG. A project supervisor explains experiencing the 'culture shock' of a Dutch student who (through her project work) is taken outside her familiar world of experience and into a more diverse context in her own (Dutch) society. The experience leads to considerable reflection, and we can assume that this reflection represents a powerful learning moment for the student. Issues of ethnicity, social class and bias come to the surface in this way.

Given the diversity in the academic staff, it is possible that other UCG project supervisors might be able to contribute experience and expertise to the preparation of students in such situations. This relates to the potential for greater teamwork between project supervisors, which is not yet optimized because both the project and several of the project supervisors are new. All of the above can be related to Carroll's (2015) principle that we should provide students with context-specific information and support, which is related to expectation management.

4.5 Further investigation of the principles

The remaining principles (5 and 6 in Carroll 2015) are not addressed in this report, but should be considered once the first year project education has been through its first iteration and can be fully evaluated.

5: Be adaptable, flexible and responsive to evidence [evaluation]

Principle 5 relates to the evaluation cycle and the use of evidence to improve the teaching and learning processes. During this case study, project supervisors were already able to reflect individually in relation to the international classroom, but it is still too early to gain insights into the functioning of the more formal evaluation cycle. At a later date, evaluations with students will provide UCG with essential information not only in relation to the project education itself, but also to gain an understanding the role of the supportive skills workshops. For instance, how exactly does a workshop on 'the international classroom' or 'teambuilding' contribute to the group processes in the project education?

6: Prepare students for life in a globalised world [graduate attributes & employability]

Principle 6 could be more related to the project education as the topics of the projects lend themselves to students building understandings of themselves as global citizens. However, this would need to be made more explicit through the learning outcomes.

"The alignment between generic attributes at the institutional level and learning outcomes at programme and course level offers good opportunities for monitoring and evaluation of the internationalisation process and creating evidence of the added value of internationalisation." (Catherine Meissner, Internal memo on Graduate Attributes, IC project 2017).

When the time is right, the IC project can play a supportive role here, building on previous work at Computing Science.

5. The way forward?

It should be noted that this is a first run for this redesigned approach to project work at UCG, and furthermore that many of the project supervisors are working in this educational environment for the first time this year. Not only this, but they are running projects that have not been run before with novice Bachelor's students. The first observation, therefore, is that an enormous amount has been achieved within a short space of time and a foundation has been laid for future revision and redesign. One of the aims of the international classroom project is to promote a curriculum design that builds greater understanding of diversity as an asset and a resource, and it seems that the opportunity this project has provided for reflection has already led individual project supervisors to think more deeply about these issues. This is also demonstrated in the cases presented in section 4.

Another observation is that there is quite a difference in the teaching styles of project supervisors, even though all the project supervisors work in a 'student-centred' way, placing student learning at the fore and providing students with feedback at both individual and group levels. The differences in teaching style are hardly surprising given the variety of backgrounds, the differences in disciplines and the related expectations regarding what constitutes knowledge and learning, and of course the differences in personality. This observation is therefore not to be seen as a criticism but rather a recognition that this diversity in the teaching team represents a 'radical resource' that could be tremendously beneficial to the students when applied in a considered way. However, at the moment individual teachers are insufficiently aware of the potential they have to complement each other in

teamwork because in this first year of the new project they have inevitably had to focus on 'getting the job done', which has meant concentrating primarily on ensuring the success of their own projects and meeting the needs of their own students.

The opportunity then, moving forward, is to build a team comprising a diverse group of individuals so that all students get full advantage of these differences and are able to use the project supervisors as role models as they start to understand themselves as members of the UCG interdisciplinary 'knowledge community'. How such team-building can be achieved is a matter for UCG academic staff to decide. A successful format will need to fit in with the local organisational culture, and the planning has to be realistic in the context of the project supervisors' other tasks and responsibilities - because project education is only one area in which these academic staff are active.

Nevertheless, on the basis of this case study, it seems that project education is an area in which UCG can build an international classroom around a community of project supervisors. This would be a UCG interpretation of the international classroom, aligning the resource of its teachers with learning activities and learning outcomes of the students in projects that consistently take into account the good practice principles for international curricular design proposed by Carroll and others.

Recommendations

In support of the above building process, the following key recommendations aim to promote the further development of 'purposefulness' in learning and teaching in small-scale interactive education at UCG.

1. Learning outcome 11 on intercultural awareness (appendix 4) should be refined and embedded wherever possible in the other learning outcomes at programme level (in the Core Programme). Learning outcome 11 already indicates that intercultural awareness influences students' performance of all other learning outcomes in an international classroom. More precise definitions of these learning outcomes will help the project education coordinator and project supervisors to make more informed judgments about exactly how the 'international' and the 'intercultural' contribute to the learning of UCG students in different educational activities in the core programme. This will also help coordinators to decide where UCG students might contribute to cooperative activities in other settings, for example at other faculties, at the Hanze University of Applied Sciences, and in the wider community.

2. Diversity needs to be understood in its widest sense at UCG and celebrated. UCG needs to make a fuller and more informed use of the diversity of experience and expertise in its academic staff so that this rich resource can achieve its full potential. An understanding of different aspects of diversity also needs to be embedded across the curriculum through workshops and other activities that allow students to understand themselves and others in relation to aspects such a structural racism, feminism and socio-economic bias. This process provides an opportunity for a structured sharing of experiences and perspectives amongst academic staff, contributing to the teambuilding process at UCG, which is still a young faculty with very many teachers who are quite new to the university and also to the Netherlands.

3. This investigation has made a start in looking at the experience of UCG as an international classroom and provides indications as to salient issues. However, in line with the IC project proposal (2016-2017), this investigation is limited to project education in the first year. It would be beneficial now to take a broader perspective with a larger group of academic teachers who can produce examples depicting the relevance and impact of the international classroom across the curriculum. Furthermore, it is important to include the student perspective in understanding how effective certain instruments, including the skills workshops and the project education design, are to students' learning in the context of the international classroom. Again, this can only be achieved with reference to a more worked out set of international and intercultural learning outcomes.

References

Carroll, J. (2015). *Tools for teaching in an educationally mobile world.* Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Haines, K. (2017). Purposeful interaction and the professional development of content teachers: Observations of small-group teaching and learning in the international classroom. In J. Valcke & R. Wilkinson (Eds.), *Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education: Perspectives on Professional Practice.* Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Leask, B. (2015). *Internationalizing the curriculum.* Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

University of Groningen (2014). *International classroom pilot at International Bachelor's in Medicine Groningen (IBMG).* Retrieved from http://www.rug.nl/about-us/where-do-we-stand/education-policy/international-classroom/internationalclassroompilotibmg_final.pdf

University of Groningen (2015). *The International Classroom (IC) pilot at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences (FMNS): findings and recommendations.* Retrieved from http://www.rug.nl/about-us/where-do-we-stand/education-policy/international-classroom/tweefmnsexecutivesummaryfinalversionapril2015-1.pdf

Appendix 1

Initial briefing on Internationalisation of the Curriculum principles and Purposeful interaction

Project supervisors were provided with a guiding document and a PowerPoint with some further information. All project supervisors were recommended to read Leask 2015, pages 96 to 104.

The following points arose during the meeting:

1. To what extent is good teaching in the international classroom just 'good teaching'?
   Previous case studies show that thinking about teaching in the international classroom can be a catalyst for reflection and development in other parts of the curriculum. So in that sense it is about 'good teaching'.
   However, there is a conceptual foundation that gives the 'international classroom' its own identity. For instance:
   "The creation of a dynamic, intercultural, global learning community in the classroom often requires that teachers and students step out of their comfort zone. It is important that you overtly signal the value of multiple perspectives and encourage students to share their different ways of thinking, doing, and being in the world through carefully managed activities."(Leask 2015: 104)

2. This project is not only about cultures amongst students but also cultures amongst teachers. This means that we recognize the subjectivity that we bring to the teaching task, and that involves understanding ourselves as people with particular cultural and disciplinary perspectives which we can make more explicit through the project.

3. We need to become more conscious of the backgrounds of students. This is a process of asking, discovering and becoming aware of underlying assumptions.
   Leask (2015: 100) mentions the tendency of students to retreat into cultural 'silos' (comfort zones) if they don't understand what is expected of them. If the 'rules of the game are unclear', they will produce a comfortable 'home away from home'.
   It is important to recognize that students may do this when choosing for particular partners in their project groups.

4. This project assumes that students will be confronted with the difficulties that can arise from diversity - such as the hidden assumptions and the differing perspectives - and that this is part of the learning process expressed in the following learning outcome:
   "The student is able to … perform all of the above in situations where there is cultural diversity, demonstrating the ability to overcome difficulties caused by cultural diversity and the ability to make use of the international community in a positive way."
   This learning outcome implies that students will learn how to demonstrate respectfulness to others and open-mindedness to other perspectives. This is more than 'tolerance' – it is an active process involving transitions in people. This process is activated in the projects and should therefore be observable. If it is observable, it is possible to make it explicit through feedback and reflection procedures.

Appendix 2: Prompt for project supervisor logbooks (November/December 2016)

How does the interaction function as a means to produce learning?

How does the interaction function 'to make use of the resource of international community (diversity) in a positive way'?

What role does the teacher play in the process of facilitating the interaction?

How does the teacher intervene or manage the interaction – for what reason and with what effect?

At which moments does the interaction become 'purposeful' in the teacher's perspective?

What is the role of feedback in this process? How transparent are the feedback steps (a) feed up (b) feedback (c) feed forward (Hattie & Timperley 2007)

What is the relationship between feedback and assessment?

Appendix 3: Questions for semi-structured interviews with project supervisors (February 2017)

You've now been working as Project Supervisor with the UCG project groups for a block.

1. To what extent do you see the project work at UCG as an example of an 'international classroom'?
   What elements contribute to the development of an international classroom in your opinion?
   What elements restrict the development of an international classroom?
2. What is your understanding of purposeful interaction at this point?
   In what ways does is the interaction purposeful and in what ways not?
   What 'instruments' do you have at your disposal to influence this purposeful interaction?
3. We think of an international classroom as one in which diversity is a resource that contributes to the teaching and learning processes. What is your experience (so far) of this in relation to the projects?
4. Diversity
   How does the diversity in the student group function as an enabler or blocker to the international classroom?
   How does the diversity in the teacher group function as an enabler or blocker to the international classroom?
5. Learning outcome
   How do you interpret the following learning outcome in relation to the project work?
   "… perform all of the above in situations where there is cultural diversity, demonstrating the ability to overcome difficulties caused by cultural diversity and the ability to make use of the resource of international community in a positive way"
6. Teacher competences
   What skills and experience do you already use in order to (a) actively supervise the project groups and (b) support the development of an international classroom?
   What training or support would empower you in further developing this project into an international classroom?
7. Tasks and activities
   How do the tasks and activities act as an enabler or blocker to the international classroom?
8. Quality: Communication, production and display
   How does the international classroom affect the quality of student communication, production and display (i.e. student learning activity)?
   What training or support would empower students in further developing this project into an international classroom?
9. Feedback and assessment
   To what extent is the international classroom element (i.e. differences in cultures, backgrounds, prior learning…) taken into account in the giving and receiving of feedback and in the assessment?
10. What do you think is the student perspective on this?
11. Could we define a case in which you could clarify (some of) the above through examples?

Appendix 4: Draft of learning outcomes for Core Programme (16/10/16)

Category	Learning outcomes: The student is able to ….
1. Collaboration	demonstrate leadership and effective participation in group work. Shows both task-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership styles and ability to adapt leadership style to peers and circumstances.
2. Defining a problem	identify a problem and delineate it clearly. The student should be able to do this both for an academic research problem and for a problem of importance to society and community
3. Scenario thinking	imagine scenarios that are relevant to the problem. Review possible scenarios creatively, effectively and comprehensively.
4. Information handling	collect relevant information from a variety of sources, including experts in academic disciplines
5. Effective solution	produce a realistic and compelling solution to the problem. In doing so, identify the most valued scenario which can realistically be accomplished. Make decisions based on risks faced and resources available in alternative scenarios. Adapts flexibly to changes in circumstances.
6. Evaluating solutions	critically evaluate programmes and policies in societal settings.
7. Methods of own discipline	deploy the research methods of his/her major discipline with a high level of competence.
8. Cross-disciplinary literacy and interdisciplinary integration	make use of scientific methods from disciplines beyond her/his major specialisation. Integrate approaches drawn from different disciplines in producing a solution to a complex problem.
9. Reflection on methods	critically reflect on methods used, showing proper awareness of their strengths and limitations.
10. Communication	convey findings effectively, choosing a format which is appropriate to the project and the audience. Communicate to a high standard in oral, visual, written and creative presentation formats.
11. Intercultural awareness	perform all of the above in situations where there is cultural diversity, demonstrating the ability to overcome difficulties caused by cultural diversity and the ability to make use of the resource of international community in a positive way.
12. Ethical awareness	perform all of the above, taking appropriate account of the ethical dimensions of the situation at hand.
13. Personal skills	show the drive, enthusiasm and motivation to develop an idea and to be persistent, committed and willing to work hard to convert the idea into a reality. reflect upon his/her own perspectives and positions in a local and global context. reflect upon his/her personal performance (strengths and weaknesses), guide his/her own learning process aiming to engage in lifelong learning and make deliberate choices for a future professional life. reflect upon the way he/she contributes to the community.