Enhancing Student Capacity for Critical Thought/Reflection through International Opportunities

Professor Bairbre Redmond
Provost Universitas 21
Scope of Presentation

- What do employers value in terms of cognitive abilities?
- A brief look at the nature of critical thinking
- The impact of internationalization on critical thought
- Helping students to develop cognitive flexibility from international experiences
Critical Thought as a Graduate Attribute

- ‘Capacity to proactively engage in critical reflection and evaluation of practice (U. of Queensland)

- ‘Willingness to learn and reflect on own learning and development’ (U. of Edinburgh)

- ‘Demonstrate critical reflection on their learning and the social context of their activities’ (U. College Dublin)

- ‘Reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, education and career development’ (U. of Glasgow)
Universities want students to be critical thinkers- but what should critically thoughtful students look like?

Will they be ...

- Thoughtful?
- Emotionally Intelligent?
- Common Sense?
- Capable of Critical Reflection?

What do Employers Value?
Sought-after Employability Skills

- **Adaptability and flexibility**, resilience, (State of Victoria, Australia)

- **Flexible approach** to work: able to adapt and work with employers to deliver improved patient care (NHS)

- Accepting feedback, authenticity, availability, discretion, **flexibility**, integrity (GMC Clinical Competence).

- Responsive and intellectually well-grounded individuals who are flexible and can readily adapt to new demands and challenges (South African Qualifications Authority)

- ‘Showing independence and initiative in identifying problems and solving them; *applying a range of strategies to problem solving*’ (Australian Chamber of Commerce)
Employers value graduates who are cognitively flexible & adaptable

So, how good are we at cognitively flexibility and critical thought...?

Reflective Judgement Model
Reflective Reasoning
Knowledge claims cannot be made with certainty

- Knowledge is evaluated within different contexts
- I re-evaluate my judgments as new data become available

Quasi-Reflective Reasoning
Knowledge fits most circumstances; but leaves confusion

- Some things cannot be known with absolute certainty, but..
- I pay attention only to evidence that fits what I already believe

Pre-Reflective Reasoning
Knowledge is passed to me by experts

- There is one correct answer to most problems
- All problems are well-structured
Reflective Judgement Index by Age

Reflective

Quasi-Reflective

Pre-Reflective
How Does Internationalization Fit It?

• A lot of research on **positive impact of internationalization/study abroad** on students

• Study abroad proven to **increase cultural sensitivity**

• **BUT less evidence that it has impact on critical thought in general**

• **AND high level of similar changes seen from travel in general**
Phases of Critical Thought

1. **Trigger Event** (Usually an unexpected event that causes some kind of inner discomfort of confusion).
Study abroad research shows that students’ equilibrium is upset by:

- Fitting in socially
- New Academic challenges
- Communication /Language barriers
- Cultural adjustment
- Living/working within new environments
- Loneliness & Isolation
Phases of Critical Thought

1. **Trigger Event** (Usually an unexpected event that causes some kind of inner discomfort of confusion).

2. **Appraisal of Event**

3. **Developing Alternative Perspectives**

4. **Integrating them into new ways of thinking**
How can universities help students to understand and consolidate cognitive gains from international triggers?

Theorists: Dewey, Kolb, Gibbs
Emerging Issues

- Need **to help students analyze/re-appraise their thought processes** after international experiences.
- **Reflective Journals rarely work** without skilled on-going monitoring and mentoring.
- Need to **create effective internationalization trigger events** for students who can’t physically travel.
- We have to **remain vigilant** for when trigger events become too great for students to cope with.
U21’s Current Related Projects

• To use U21’s worldwide members (including 1 million+ students) to create new collective international ‘triggers’ for all students

• To advise and support better pedagogical approaches to post-trigger events to encourage genuine critical thought change

• To carry out research into impact of new effective cross-national student initiatives

• To share greater understanding of and support for good international student mental health
Thank you

Any questions?

bairbre.redmond@universitas21.com