

From Business Undergraduates to Global Citizens: the challenges for academics

There has been a growing focus in the pedagogical literature on the concept of global citizens (for example, see Clifford and Montgomery, 2014). UK universities are recruiting international students in increasing numbers, resulting in a myriad of different learning styles, cultural expectations and prior experience in our classrooms (De Wit 2009). Advocates of global citizenship have argued that in a context of extremely international cohorts, higher education should enable students to develop into adults able to operate in multicultural settings, displaying behaviour that shows high level of awareness of, and consideration for, the diversity of backgrounds and worldviews that are likely to be encountered in a modern workplace and more generally in society (see Haigh and Clifford 2010 & Clifford and Montgomery 2014 & QAA 2007).

While most higher education professionals would agree that such an approach is desirable, they face clear challenges in implementing it (see Chang 2008, Marginson 2007 and Groeppel-Klein, Germelmann and Glaum, 2010). For example, cohorts may be diverse, but this does not mean that students relate to each other effectively, nor that operating in a diverse environment leads them to develop the characteristics that have been identified of global citizens. This is particularly the case in the teaching of professional skills on large business school programmes. This poses particular challenges, which relate to ensuring relevance to all students, even though professional practices and career paths and ambitions vary enormously. Resource constraints limit teaching teams' abilities to tailor the learning experience to the needs of specific student individual and groups. However, any attempt at a 'one size fits all' approach leads to a significant proportion of the cohort disengaging from the subject matter.

Seeking to explore these issues, we will present the results of a qualitative research project that includes in-depth semi-structured interviews with teachers and facilitators of employability courses at five UK business schools on the practice of teaching skills to large international cohorts. This will make a distinctive contribution in at least two ways. Firstly, it will identify and explore natural synergies in the literatures on global citizenship and employability, both on which are relatively under-researched and under-theorised. Secondly, there have been few studies of professional skills education in UK higher education. Our work represents an initial move to fill this gap. This could enable knowledge sharing among a network of academics that are teaching employability and global citizenship.

Selected References

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