Northumbria Research Link

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Higher Education in the Global Village

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Global futures, global communities?
The role of culture, language and communication in an internationalised university.

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"Even to move to another culture is to be touched by major influences, as those of us who have lived in other countries know. The enormous change of perception that new cultural and educational experiences can work are an important influence in the formation of people's working lives as well as on their personal development" (Iredale 1994: 7).

1. Introduction and aims of the paper

This paper is one of a set of working papers that focus on the cultural and linguistic practices in internationalised university contexts across a number of different countries including the UK, Denmark and Australia. The research network CALPIU which is based at Roskilde University in Denmark is interrogating the nature of cultural and linguistic practices in contemporary Higher Education. This is being done from a range of research perspectives with different foci on language, culture and social or academic identities. This particular paper concentrates on presenting a student view of internationalised Higher Education in contrast to other papers that emphasise staff perspectives (e.g. Preisler 2008, this volume). Here we consider the role of culture, language and communication in an internationalised university and suggest that the development of inter-cultural competence in students (and indeed staff although this is not researched here) should be considered to be an integral aim of inter-nationalisation.

The paper examines how international students'[1] experience of studying in Higher Education in another country may prepare them for living and working in a global context.

It is noted in research on UK home students' experience (Ball et al. 2000; Shipton 2005) that being at university changes students' perceptions of themselves and others. It is suggested in this paper that the international nature of mobile students' experience may accentuate this development and provide them with a changed perspective on what it means to live, study and socialise with people from different cultures. This perspective could enable students to develop intercultural competences that may contribute to their professional and personal futures. This self-awareness and wider intercultural view of self being developed in the international student may be contrasted with a more mono-cultural experience of some home students who may not be benefiting from the social and cultural diversity being created by internationalisation in Higher Education.

This paper draws on data from a study carried out in 2003 that investigated the social and cultural experience of a group of international students in a UK university. In addition to this, the CALPIU sub-project intends to further the findings of this data by carrying out research into current student perspectives on the role of culture, language and social interaction in an internationalised university in 2008. This part of the project aims to establish to what extent student views on studying and living in an international education environment have changed over the past five years.

2. What is internationalisation and why internationalise?

Internationalisation is a complex concept but is a socially constructed phenomenon, linked with notions of time, space and subjectivity (Dixon

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[1] When this paper uses the term international student it refers to students who have travelled from their home countries to study in Higher Education in another country (Carroll and Ryan 2005). This group consists of students who are normally resident outside of the host country and in the case of the UK this would include students from the European Union who are considered 'home' students for fees purposes but who may share experiences with students from more distant shores. The paper also refers to home students and this refers to students who have chosen to go to university in the country where they have previously been educated, in the case of the research that supports this paper these students are resident in the UK.

2006) but the effects of these complex global processes are real and immediate resulting in global student mobility on a larger scale than has been possible before. Internationalisation is a socio-political force that has developed alongside global changes in international relations, commerce and societies. Universities have been affected by global changes and have responded to these technological and global developments by expanding international recruitment and developing a more corporate approach to education, amongst other initiatives. One of the major effects of these movements has been the rapid increase in international or mobile students on university campuses. The impact of this has been far-ranging across Higher Education institutions but this paper focuses on the social and cultural aspects of these changes. In particular, the international student experience is focused upon with a view to establishing through qualitative enquiry the nature of the 'human' effects of internationalisation.

Definitions of internationalisation vary according to context and perspective and there is considerable variation in the meanings attributed to the term (Knight 1997, Gunn 2005, Pretor Fok 2007). Stone (2006) notes that the question of what internationalisation means "invites seduction into a quagmire of potentially unsatisfying responses" (2006: 334). The concept itself thus remains elusive and although resources, programmes and institutions of many countries across the globe are "mobilised around the concept of internationalisation" a clear and comprehensive definition of the core idea is still "conceptually elusive" (Callan 1998: 44). The perception of the nature of internationalisation can be determined by the stakeholders who are involved in the process; the goals, rationale, resources and individual institution will determine the way that internationalisation is pursued (Kishun 1998: 64). Stone (2006) points out that instead of asking what internationalisation means, universities should be asking "why internationalise" and "what *should* internationalisation mean?" (2006: 334).

A common perception of internationalisation in Higher Education is that it is the integration of an international or intercultural dimension into the teaching and research of an institution (Deardorff 2006, Wächter ed. 1999, Knight 1995). Many sources also agree that the introduction of this intercultural dimension is seen as a means of increasing the quality of the institution and the education it provides. De Wit (1999) adds the terms "intercultural" to his definition and also stipulates that internationalisation includes both international and local elements. It has been noted, how-

ever, that the basis and commitment to internationalisation rests on a "relatively fragile foundation" and there is a perception that the philosophies and principles of internationalisation have not spread to all areas of Higher Education institutions (Callan, 1998: 45). Indeed in 2007 Edwards notes that as far as internationalisation is concerned she feels we are "still having the same conversation we were all having in the 1970s" (2007: 373).

The complexity of the nature of internationalisation and its pervasiveness in so many aspects of higher education also means that it is very difficult to measure. The comments made above may be an indication that some institutions may have developed effective recruitment policies and support systems but are not extending the intercultural dimensions mentioned above into the teaching, learning and research functions of the university. There may be some aspects of Higher Education that are more susceptible to internationalisation than others and it would be interesting to investigate what characteristics are inherent in the areas of Higher Education that are resisting internationalisation. It is interesting to ask how universities or practitioners will be able to tell when effective internationalisation has been achieved. It may be that internationalisation of university teaching and learning practice will be the most difficult aspect of internationalisation to quantify. If we perceive internationalisation of university practice as being linked with effective approaches to teaching, learning and assessment it will be as difficult to establish as the measurement of "good practice". Perhaps one of the indicators of whether the student learning experience is showing signs of internationalisation will be the generation of successful graduates who can use their intercultural skills in their future professional and personal lives. The challenge of course is to be able to measure this.

3. Caveat: a complex picture

Before proceeding with this paper it is important to note that the idea that international students form part of a 'global community' is not intended to imply that this is a simple process involving uncomplicated transitions across communities. This paper does not try to present what Holliday calls a "neat global cosmopolitan dream" (2007: 15). Furthermore there is no suggestion here that international students study abroad in order to become internationalised from a 'Western' viewpoint, that is according to

the 'West's' or the 'centre's' (Holliday 2007) definition of what it means to have an international outlook. There is no intention here to imply that the planet is a simple system of national societies extending to global villages (Bhabha 1994). Bhabha advocates a "vernacular cosmopolitanism" that appreciates cultural experience from the 'minority' voice (ibid), in this case the international student. Again it is important to note that Bhabha's definition should not imply a uni-directional minority voice but a complex pattern of interrelated groups and communities. It is the opportunity that Higher Education provides to meet and mix with other nationalities from across the globe that enables students to develop an international perspective. However, the picture is complex and for this reason this paper presents a detailed picture of a particular context of Higher Education through the actual experiences and voices of international students who participated in this research. There is a need to understand cultural and cross-cultural experience as "lived experience" (Holliday 2007) and it is essential that Higher Education can understand the "lifeworld" of the student (Beard et al. 2007).

Thus, this paper emphasises the idea of participation in 'global communities' from a point of view of international students' perceptions of themselves and their perceived identity as being international. It is students' developing and changing sense of themselves as part of such an international community that is important in this discussion and there is no claim that a physical 'global community' exists as such independently of these perceptions. It is suggested however that the experience of spending time with students from other cultures, countries and communities may help them to develop an "intercultural competence" (Byram 1997) that could be advantageous to them in later life in both professional (Boud and Falchikov 2006) and personal contexts. The links between development of language competence and perceived identity is also seen as crucial to this discussion.

4. Language, identity and change

As noted above the issue of language and identity is seminal to the discussion of students' views of themselves as being "international". In particular, language development and competence is seen here as a factor that enables the development of an international or global perspective. Kramsch (2006) notes that some definitions of language learning have

seen language as "social scaffolding for the development of the mind in interaction with others" (2006: 98). This puts language and interaction at the centre of the development of our sense of ourselves and perceptions of others and according to Kramsch this is what enables us to construct the meanings that we call "ourselves" (2006: 99). Kramsch also makes a crucial link between language and cultural identity and perceived personal attachment to present, past or imagined communities (ibid). These assertions support the idea that international students' development of language and interaction with others may influence their perception of themselves as part of a "global community", albeit imagined.

Language is strongly bound up with our social identities and our use of language aligns us with social groups and cultural practices (Byram and Fleming 1998: 2). When people move from one social context to another and meet with speakers of other languages there is a sense in which negotiation of meanings in language is necessary. For communication to be successful it is essential that speakers across cultures have the same understandings of the deeper culturally-specific pragmatic meanings of language. Thus as international students move from one cultural and social environment to another and there are a number of linguistic environments surrounding their new context, there may be a process of reconstruction of meaning through their new social network. In a sense this occurs in order that a new social "reality" may be constructed. Byram and Fleming describe a similar process occurring through language learning:

> Only after a process of discovering those meanings and practices [in the new environment] can learners negotiate and create a new reality with their interlocutors, one which is new to both learners and interlocutors, a shared world of interactions and experience (1998: 2-3).

This new social reality is what Bhabha termed the "third space", a third and new "culture" that is formed by the meeting and mingling of two different cultures (1994). The concept of the "third space" is an interesting one in terms of this discussion as it is a means of explaining the process at work when individuals from a particular context move to a new cultural and linguistic context and through interaction with others, a third culture or space develops. The "third space" is a highly complex concept but is useful here as it moves away from the idea of culture being a fixed or immovable feature. Bhabha's idea of a shifting and changing hybrid

culture negates the idea of cultural essentialism where pre-set ideas of culture and nationality breed stereotypes (Holliday et al. 2004). Thus, "third space" is a construct that seeks to explain the personal and cultural development of an individual and assumes that "cultures are dynamic systems which are constantly renegotiated and cultural meaning is created through the interactions of speakers/writers" (Finkbeiner 2005). This emphasis on the individual puts personal identity at the centre of culture and in terms of the educational process suggests that learners' prior knowledge, beliefs and values are central to the process of "attaining intercultural competence" (Byram 1998).

Considering the issue of identity from the point of view of the international student, it is interesting to note that upon coming to a new educational context international students are continually forced to restate and renegotiate their identity. The question "where are you from?" is probably the one that international students are asked the most frequently and this requires them to re-associate themselves with their national origin. In one sense this constant reaffirming of the link between their nationality and their identity is a force that emphasises national stereotypes both in the eyes of the person asking the question and, perhaps reluctantly, in the eyes of the international student (Bochner et al. 1977: 279). Thus it may be that when the actual boundaries of culture are more strongly emphasised it may be more difficult for these boundaries to be crossed. It is perhaps in concentrating on the national boundaries and the lines that divide groups of students that isolation is emphasised.

However, although international students are seemingly encouraged to identify and define themselves according to their nationalities, there is a strong sense in which their experience of moving to a new social context and living and working with a range of national groups enables them to achieve a development in their perception of themselves and others. One does not have to go abroad to achieve this development, as education itself can be a catalyst for this. However, the intensity of the experience of travelling abroad can perhaps initiate or accentuate this type of development. Iredale (1994) notes the power of the experience of living in a different country and culture and its value in shaping the future of an intercultural person. He states

> Even to move to another culture is to be touched by major influences, as those of
> us who have lived in other countries and cultures know. The enormous changes
> of perception that new cultural and educational experiences can work are an

important influence in the formation of people's working lives as well as on their personal development (Iredale 1994: 7).

The process of these changes in perception appear to take place through a form of "reflexivity", a process through which learners first consider themselves and their own "culture", then can see the culture and social identities of others in a new and interesting light.

5. The Research Study

The aim of the research carried out in 2003 was to analyse the role of social networks in the academic and personal experience of a group of international students in a UK university. The study sought to explore the factors that were involved in the international student's experience of social contact and focused on the relationships that students formed both in their academic activity and in the environment that surrounds the classroom. The study employed a qualitative methodology, using semi-structured interviews and an extensive shadowing scheme to collect data. This involved observing and analysing the role of social networks in the academic and personal experience of a particular group of international students. The research sample was a purposive one and focused upon a selected social group of international students. This group was not intended to be "representative" of the international student community. However, the international student community is always present on campus and it is suggested here that in similar contexts issues and aspects of experience of this student group could be resonant of the experience of other international social networks.

As far as choice of student in this study is concerned, firstly, students who were established in their studies were selected to avoid the focus on "settling in" or "adjustment" which often dominates studies of international students (Altbach 1991; Beaver and Tuck 1998; Furnham 1997 and Unterhalter and Green 1997). A form of snowball sampling was used to select students who were part of a loose social network. This included students from more than one nationality. However, the study began with the premise that issues of nationality and culture can lead to misjudgements or stereotyping and thus it was decided to choose the students across nationality, relying on one social network rather than any politically constructed divisions of nationality. The study consists of data drawn from two exploratory focus groups, a pilot study involving 4

students and a detailed main phase with 7 students. The analysis of the data involved focus on emerging themes, developing a coding system through use of the computer database Nudist 5 (N5). Some data drawn from the main part of the study will be presented here and this is taken from the seven participants, all of whom were given fictitious names. The network diagram (Fig. 1) below gives details of their names, nationalities, gender and their relationships to each other.
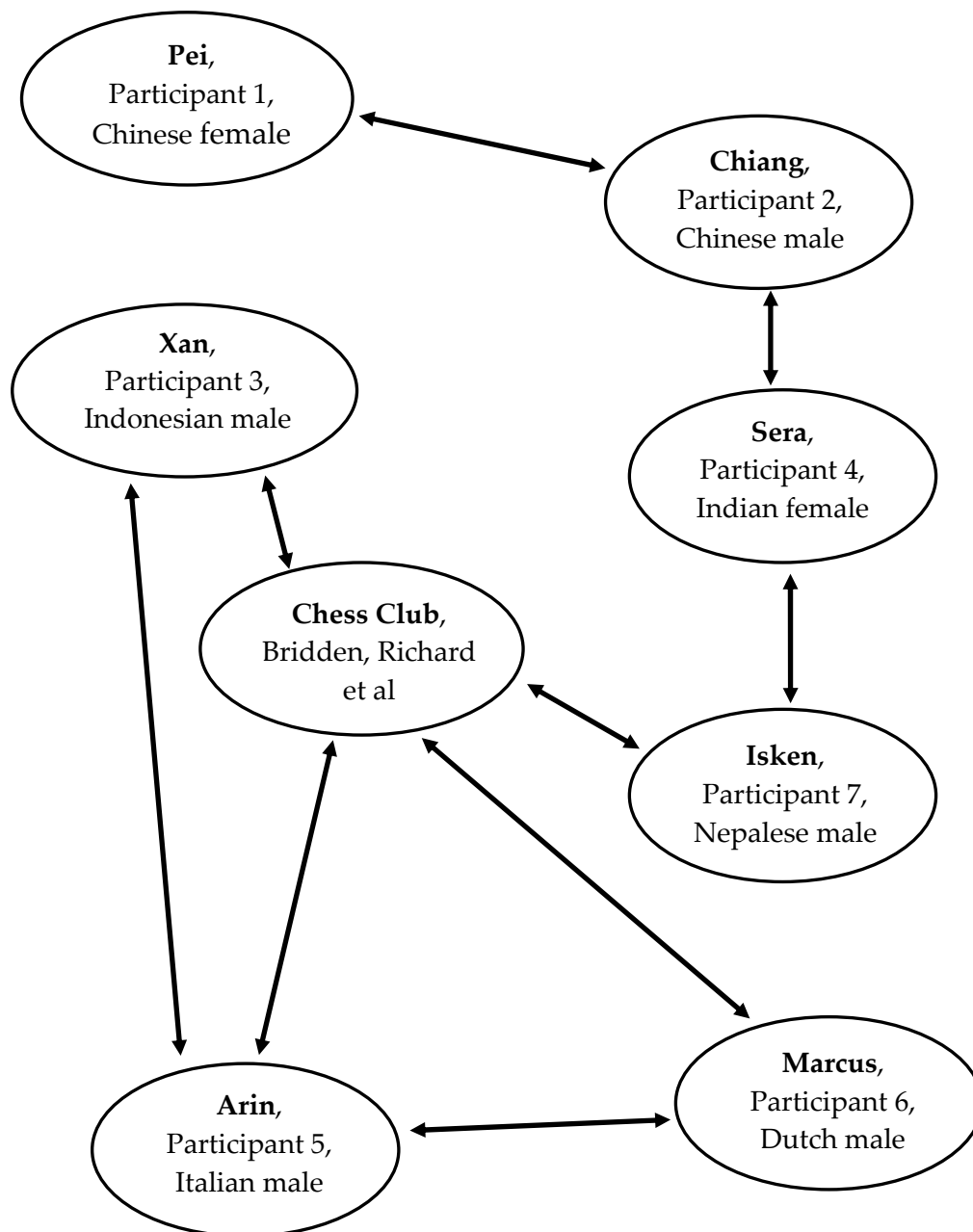
Figure 1. Network diagram of participants

Each student was shadowed and observed for two separate days or a series of half days and followed to lectures, seminars or tutorials and in their everyday movements around the campus. In addition to this, as a number of the participants were involved in the university Chess Club some further observation was carried out in this social context and a group discussion with members of the Chess Club was recorded. The interviews and Chess Club discussion were transcribed and throughout the observation simultaneous field notes were made. The aim of this was to access rich and fine-grained data and also to attempt to see the university context from a student-led perspective. In addition to this, the shadowing combined an observation element, exemplified by parti-cipation in the Chess Club where in many cases field notes were not being taken but research was still being carried out (participants were made aware that this was the case). Combining the shadowing and observation methods described with in-depth interviews proved to be a powerful means of accessing a pluralistic view of the research context.

6. The findings of the 2003 study

6.1 Language as a means of gaining entry to a global community

This section presents the student view of the role of language and identity in the development of a global community. Language was perceived by the students in the study as a means of learning to live with others and of learning about the culture of the new context. It appeared that English was viewed as an international language that allows students to gain entry into a more global arena.

Improving English language skills was seen by students to be very important. They tended to view this as part of the purpose of their time at university and not simply as a tool to support their studies but as an achievement in its own right. Many aspects of their reasons for wanting to improve their language related to their desire to live, work and be with others in an international context. English language skills were viewed by students as an important qualification that might enable them to access a global community. To this end, students appeared to be often searching for ways of improving their English. Their desire for relationships with home students seemed to be part of this aim. Arin, a male Italian student, supports this suggestion when he says that he believes the only effective

way to learn a language is to live in that country and mix with its people. He berates the approach to language teaching in his home country and suggests that learning a language must be experiential. He says,

> From my experience, to learn a foreign language you actually have to live in that foreign country. Interact with people. I was studying English in Italy but I have to say that the way they teach it is appalling. I don't think the teachers themselves speak decent English; they concentrate very much on the grammar aspects so you tend to do lots of tedious exercises so it's not a very intelligent way of teaching a foreign language. Most of my skills in English and other languages, I learn them [in] the field.

The need to mix with English speakers as a way of gaining exposure to English is also important to Pei, a female Chinese student. She reports that she and her closest Chinese friends have tried to speak English to each other in order to improve their language but this is very difficult to sustain. She says,

> Sometimes we try to speak English. We cannot speak English the whole day, just one or two hours. Even that's better than nothing. Yes it's better. We try to speak English.

Thus it is difficult to speak English when you know both interlocutors could communicate more effectively in their own language. However, if one is determined to do so this is still possible. Pei talks about an experience when she met someone and began speaking English but then was surprised to discover that her new friend was also Chinese. Following this discovery, they both continued to speak to each other in English. Pei says

> I sat with a young lady. She told me she was from the course MBA and so we talked with each other and at first we didn't know each other so we spoke English. But later [laughs] we realised we were both from China and I said we would speak Chinese but we still spoke English. I was very surprised. Yeah, I thought she would speak Chinese but she always spoke English to me. I thought I better speak English to her [laughs]. We just spoke English all the time, very interesting.

This contradicts the commonly cited stereotype of international students deliberately choosing to speak in their own language. Pei desires to speak in English as much as possible and in the face of lack of opportunities

with British speakers, speaks English to other Chinese people. It also raises interesting issues relating to language as a means of expressing one's identity (Sysoyev 2002). In the interaction above Pei got to know someone through her second language before they realised that they shared a first language. To Pei this seemed an unusual way of getting to know someone and she found it an interesting and new experience. This presents a picture of an international university context where English is assumed to be a 'default' lingua franca.

6.2 Students' impressions of their "selves"

During the interviews the students reflected on their own impressions of themselves. This involved them talking about what they believed to be the nature of their 'personality' and the effect that their experiences have had on the development of their "self". This shows how the students see themselves in relation to the rest of their community and indicates how they place themselves within their new context, their views of themselves in a current or future international community.

There was a strong sense that in the course of the interviews the students thought carefully and reflected upon themselves within their new community and their experiences both before they came to university abroad and since their arrival. It appeared that they associated some aspects of their own "self" with the establishment of their social network. The idea that they felt themselves to be "open" and "sociable" was one that recurred frequently. There was a strong motivation and even a determination to establish a wide and international group of friends and this determination was there before the students arrived at the university. Sera, a female Indian student, evidently had an imagined friendship group when she was still back at home in India and aspired for this group to be an international one. She says

> I think I only really have one friend from my home country but that was what I had in mind when I came here. I didn't come to meet more Indians or home people from my own country. I was quite determined to meet people from the rest of the world, so I didn't really go out seeking Indians.

It is interesting that this desire for a wide and international friendship group appears as part of the aims for Sera of coming to study abroad. In addition to this Sera had a fairly well-developed sense of what she wanted in her friendship group before arrival.

Other students talked often about how they saw themselves as "open" and "sociable" people and they linked this both with their description of their friendship group and their perceived success in developing their social networks. Arin says about himself

> Well I find it quite, quite easy to mingle with people and… I don't find it very difficult to get along with people… and for some reason I find it easier to mingle with people who come from other countries because maybe it's the fact that we have something in common, the fact that we're coming from a different background and joining a new culture…

This echoes Sera's desire to mix internationally but Arin takes it further by indicating that his successful friendship group is a result of this personal ability to "get along with others". In a similar way Xan, a male Indonesian student, also sees part of him as a person being that he likes to meet new people and talk to them. He also sees this as an aspect of his success socially. He says

> Like, that's part of my personality I like to make friends with everybody. I know a lot of people from different backgrounds. Since I [came here from] Indonesia I can talk differently. For example I can talk with my high-class friends or anyone. And I can have a nice informal chat with for example cleaners from my area. You know I like to talk to everyone.

Xan feels that this interest in talking to everyone and ability to adapt to everyone is something he had before he came here. This sense that this is just the way he is comes through strongly and raises the issue of whether this openness described by the students is simply a personality trait that cannot be learned and is an existent aspect of their "self".

6.3 Identity and development of "self"

In the course of the interviews and the observation, students talked about themselves and how they felt their idea of themselves had changed (or stayed the same) since they came to study abroad. It appeared that students felt that their learning experience had had an effect on their identity and their idea of their "self". A few students talked about how they had learned much about "getting on" with people from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures. Sera believed that there was something significant about international students' (or any students') ability to initiate interaction. She says that if you are outgoing and can start talking

to someone then people will respond to you. She considers that the shy or nervous international student may have an aspect of their body language and social behaviour which leads other students to make assumptions about them and their attitudes. Sera suggests that these paralinguistic signals may be a factor which influences the interaction international students have with UK students.

Further to the discussion about dependence and independence above, there is a sense in which international students have come to study abroad to achieve an independence of self. Students' descriptions of their personal motivations for coming to the UK indicate that it is almost a "rite of passage" which will enable them to find themselves and establish themselves as an individual. Arin talks about the difference in levels of independence for him. He says he feels he is an independent sort of person but needed to come here partly to get his independence from his family. He says

> In Italy because it's not easy to actually part from your parents because it is not very easy to find a good job and so I guess I had to go abroad also to achieve my independence.

In addition to independence of self, there is also an interesting issue of students noting their perseverance. Many of the students talk about trying hard and continuing to struggle until they succeed socially or academically. This is a common recurring theme and seems to indicate that they feel that their perseverance in their experience here is a particular aspect of how they have developed personally. In addition to this, their sense of themselves having persevered suggests a growth in esteem of self and indicates that students may feel they have succeeded. This development of self through the experience of studying abroad is an interesting facet of students' personal growth through their education.

There is an interesting issue around the idea of adaptability and changing nature of self; Isken, a male Nepalese student, talks about retaining a professional relationship within the university and how he changes his approach to fit his different situations. Xan also talks at length about his sense of himself being adaptable and having an ability to change according to context and to whom he is speaking. Isken sees himself as easy going and relaxed (like Arin) and says himself that he can adapt to a changing environment. This seems to be another strong commonality that some students have seen as key to their social and

academic success. The students in the study seem to be people who are skilled in changing and shifting roles according to context. The students' sense of themselves as being flexible and changeable perhaps also underlines their need for reference points both within their friendship groups and in retaining their relationships with their family at a distance. It may be that their experience as international students has enabled them to be more adaptable and open to change in both context and in relationships.

7. Conclusion: citizens of the international community?

Since the idea of the global village has come into common usage, the suggestion that people across the globe have somehow become more "connected" has gathered pace within the educational setting. This may, of course, be an idealised perception of relationships and it is useful to note Holliday's caveat against constructing a neat and idealised global community (Holliday 2007). However, computers and the internet have given immediacy to communication across distance. Through the medium of information technologies and through education, students are learning to think of themselves as global citizens, seeing the world, and their place in the world, in ways much different than their parents. Today's global networks create connections between people which span time and distance in ways the world has never seen before and which are beginning to have major political, social, and educational implications (Toffler 1990).

There is a sense in which students in this study consider themselves to be preparing to become part of an international or global community. Chiang, a male Chinese student, talks about his study in the UK becoming a "passport" for him to travel and despite the fact that he wants to return to his home city of Shanghai he feels that he would like to spend time in other countries. There is a sense in which this has become part of Chiang's education and the process of achieving his educational goals incorporates a process of personal internationalisation. The idea that people can be not only literate across language but literate across the difference that exists between countries and continents is an important one for the internationalised university.

Schoorinan's (1999) definition of internationalisation in education underscores the relevance of the relationship between an education system and its global environment. She states

> Internationalisation is an ongoing counter-hegemonic educational process that occurs in an international context of knowledge and practice where societies are viewed as subsystems of a larger, inclusive world. The process of internationalisation at an educational institution entails a comprehensive, multifaceted program of action that is integrated into all aspects of education. (1999:21)

Some also maintain that "the training given to international students by the institution might assist in the development of their societies and even contribute to global and economic stability" (Bruch and Barty 1998: 21).

In summary, it appears that international students' experiences play a significant part in the formation of their identities, identities that could be said to be outward looking, and demonstrate a developing understanding of the "other". In this way international students may begin to perceive themselves as a part of an international and global community. The research carried out in the 2003 study suggests that the process of internationalising student perspectives may have begun. It is hoped that the 2008 research to be carried out for the CALPIU research network will shed further light on how this phenomena has developed. The initial data in the 2008 study shows that whilst preconceptions and fears about working in a diverse international context remain, 'successful' experience of working with other cultural groups goes some way to dispel prejudices, with students' views and perceptions of their international peers being changed by positive experiences of working together.

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