

TRANSNATIONAL TEACHING TEAMS: WORKING EFFECTIVELY

Working in an effective transnational teaching team requires coordinators in all locations to establish a strong working relationship built on trust and mutual respect. Effective communication is the enabler of strong transnational ties, which support collegial professional practices and enhances opportunities for team members to engage in contextualized curriculum development activity. The successful combination of the three elements results in ongoing professional learning for team members and enhanced learning opportunities for students.

Communication and Negotiation

Strong personal connections lead to more effective and productive working relationships.

It is important that a transnational teaching relationship gets off to a good start. Where practicable an initial face-to-face meeting can facilitate this. Regular, quality communication has been found to enhance the effectiveness of transnational teaching teams. Course/unit coordinators who are able to meet in person report that this has a positive effect on building a good relationship. Alternative communication modes cited by participants in this study include meetings via videoconference or Skype. Email can also be a useful form of communication. While email is commonly used for routine matters, care needs to be taken when using it to communicate about more complex issues.

Professional Practice

Trust is a fundamental aspect of effective professional practice. Trust can be facilitated and developed through communication and interaction around course/unit related matters.

A key to success in this area is in the development of respectful relationships, with all team members being treated as partners in a professional relationship, supporting each other's learning and practice. A comprehensive induction program for effective professional practice is required for those appointed to Course/Unit Coordinator roles.

Consultation is a key to effective working relationships. All members of a team should be involved in decision-making processes around course/unit curriculum.

A shared understanding of expectations with regard to professional practice among members of the transnational teaching team contributes to ongoing collaborative and collegial transnational relationships.

Student Learning

Transnational Course Coordinators value a curriculum that achieves clearly defined learning outcomes and provides a meaningful learning experience for students. Course/unit content will often need to be contextualized and/or customised for delivery in different locations and delivery modes, taking into consideration the cultural context as well as the differing learning needs and life experiences of students in different countries.

To ensure that course/unit learning outcomes are effectively achieved opportunities should be provided for course coordinators in all campuses to contribute to the development of course/unit material within the parameters of existing guidelines and standards.

Course coordinators in all locations should be encouraged to work towards better understanding of the contexts of their counterparts. Each environment is a unique site of learning. Understanding the 'big picture' contributes to professional learning as well as helping to build effective transnational relationships.

Quality in Teaching and Learning

The assurance of a quality experience for both teachers and learners is rarely achieved through an annual audit process. When quality is built into the agenda of all conversations between members of a transnational teaching team, it is regarded as 'business as usual' rather than a necessarily contentious debate. Participants in the study undertaken for this project identified the usefulness of ongoing open and transparent reviews covering assessment strategies, contextualized learning activities, learning resources, course/unit delivery

models, grade distributions and student feedback.

The following page describes four examples of good transnational teaching practice that were identified during the course of research for this project.

Good Practice Examples

Communication and Negotiation in a first year Accounting course

Taking the time to communicate and build an initial relationship was important for the team coordinating Accounting in Organisations and Society. Although the current coordinators have not yet met face to face, the coordinator in Vietnam reflected on how the relationship got off to a good start: “I just introduced myself. That’s very important; you have to make yourself credible because we haven’t met face to face”. She added that her Australian counterpart got a better understanding of her background when she described her past experience in transnational education. In place of a face-to-face meeting, videoconferencing and Skype were identified as useful tools in building a personal relationship and that personal contact drops a lot of barriers. “I think the collaboration with Melbourne is working well”, stated the coordinator in Vietnam.

Student Learning in an introductory Marketing course

The keys to a successful curriculum development in the Marketing Principles course have been trust and regular communication. “I communicate with him regularly. He has given us a lot of freedom to run the course and how we need to run it”, stated the course coordinator in Vietnam. While Melbourne is involved in approving things like changes to assessment, for the day to day running of the course there is little micromanagement. “We do feel quite independent in that we develop a lot of activities that are Vietnam specific. He gives us a lot of creative freedom to contextualize things as we see fit”, said the Vietnam coordinator. Having the Melbourne coordinator visit Vietnam improved understanding: “I have a course leader who is very respectful of our

team’s qualification and judgment. He’s been here several times. He knows all of us individually so he’s not just an email. We have a personal relationship which makes it much easier”. The visit allowed the Melbourne coordinator to better understand the particular context of a branch campus, and gave an understanding of how things operate in Vietnam and what the academic staff and students are like. As a result of the visits, the Vietnam coordinator stated that, “I think there’s a greater level of trust”.

Professional Practice in a Statistics course

Mutual respect and a high level of professionalism have allowed the coordinators for Business Statistics to develop a successful working relationship. An opportunity to meet face to face in Melbourne was also beneficial. “It’s a question of being able to talk with somebody, shake hands, and when you talk to somebody you actually get to know something about them that you don’t get on email”, said the coordinator in Melbourne. Strong personal relationships build trust, which is a key to an effective working relationship. Trust has been essential in the case of the Business Statistics course and has allowed the offshore team to develop a sense of ownership: “If you don’t give people ownership, you are not going to get the same sense of teaching delivery”, noted the Melbourne Coordinator. Course topics for Business Statistics are the same in Melbourne and Vietnam. However, exams are developed in Vietnam, and the teaching team in Vietnam has the ability to contextualize course content to make it more relevant for students. “The people in the location of teaching need to have the freedom, the confidence, and the ability to tailor it the way that they want”, stated the Melbourne coordinator.

Quality in a Management course

Reinforcing the value of diverse perspectives through regular discussions between members of the transnational teaching team has been an important element in the assurance of equivalent learning outcomes for students in different locations in the undergraduate Leading for Change course.

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The Melbourne coordinator explained that “We’ve been very pleased with the way colleagues from Melbourne and Vietnam have worked together – there’s been a lot of discussion about how we teach”. These discussions emphasized the importance of identifying and sharing strategies to enhance the student experience in each location. “We’ve shared ideas and criteria about what should be assessed. The way we do it differs because our delivery models differ”.

Resources

RMIT University Transnational Teaching Quick Guides

www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/bus/public/transnational

Transnational Teaching at UOW

www.google.com/search?q=%22Transnational+Teaching+at+UOW%22&rlz=1C5CHFA_enVN508VN518&oq=%22Transnational+Teaching+at+UOW%22&aqs=chrome..69i57.288j0j4&sourceid=chrome&espv=210&es_sm=119&ie=UTF-8

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