Title of example of practice:	Cross-cultural project

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Institution and initiating department/faculty
(i.e. where example of practice takes/took place):
Lancaster University, Department of European Languages and Cultures

Departments/faculties in which initiative implemented:

Department of European Languages and Cultures

Abstract
(QA question: What are/were you trying to do?)
To prepare second year students of modern European languages for periods of study and work abroad by requiring them to conduct a pilot 'ethnographic' or 'cross-cultural' project.

The project invites students to reflect on the differences between the UK and other cultures through their researching the attitudes of non-British students towards the UK and British culture. By promoting the capacity of students to identify with another person's position, the project aims to teach students about 'culture shock' and how to cope with it, how to gather 'cultural' information and write about it.

Background – contextual issues giving rise to the initiative
(QA questions: Why are/were you trying to do it? / What are/were the aims and objectives?)
Many second year British modern language students have little if any experience of working and studying in another country and are unfamiliar with the national cultural environments in which they are to spend the third year of their four year degree programmes. The 'cross-cultural project' is a component of their second year language course at Lancaster University. It falls at the end of the academic year and immediately precedes an intensive 4-day course which prepares them for the year abroad experience. It is designed to cultivate a personal awareness of the issues confronted by students when they arrive in the UK which they can then transfer to their own situation. The students thereby become conscious simultaneously of the way in which British culture is viewed from the 'outside' and of the difficulties encountered by young people when seeking to integrate with cultures other than their own.

Description of activity or initiative

(QA question: How is/was the activity/initiative implemented?)

Second year modern languages students are required to talk to foreign students on campus and explore cultural differences by means of questionnaire and interview.

- Students devise a questionnaire with around 10 questions and ask 5 foreign students to respond to it in writing. They then use the questionnaire as the basis of an interview with them. The questionnaire invites comments by respondents on their perceptions of British culture and their process of adaptation to it.
- Two of the interviewees should be from the same country, preferably one of the countries in which the student is to spend time the following year.
- If possible, the questionnaire and interview should be written and conducted in the target language of the informant.

The project consists of a summary and evaluation of the responses of the informants. The questionnaires and notes on the interviews (maximum 500 words) must be provided in an appendix and a bibliography submitted if relevant.

The project needs to be written in the language of the informant which should correspond to one of the major languages studied by the student.

As well as exploring informants' perceptions of 'British Culture', students are encouraged in their questionnaires to ask interviewees about their 'coping' strategies (coping with homesickness, coping with loneliness, speaking in the target language, etc.)

- The project is 1,000 words long, written in the appropriate target language (*though it can be longer according to circumstances*).

Evaluative comments

(QA questions: What are/were the outcomes? What is/was the impact? Is/was the activity/ initiative successful? How do you know whether or not it works/worked?)

As an element within the second-year language programme, the cross-cultural project is evaluated through feedback questionnaire and end of year one to one interviews. It is appreciated as an exercise by the students and is marked, both for the quality of the written language and for the summary of the insights it provides. It is impossible to evaluate quantitatively its impact on students' subsequent behaviour and outlook during their sojourn in the 'host' country. However, the project is followed up by work carried out by students during their period abroad which derives directly from it. This work comprises a personal 'log' or 'journal' in which students' cross-cultural experiences are recorded in writing and an extended essay in which students are required to reflect in depth on marked behaviours and outlooks within the 'host' community and on their possible origins. The cross-cultural project is therefore part of a wider programme of learning over a 15 month period. Its benefits are reflected in the quality of the year abroad work and in the students' performance in the final year.

Advice to others

It is important to prepare the students carefully for the task of carrying out the cross-cultural project with clear guidelines on how to design a questionnaire and conduct and record interviews. They should also be made aware of the ethical issues involved in ethnographic research. The projects should not be regarded as work to be carried out in isolation, but need on the contrary to be built into a wider programme to which they contribute. Focus group discussion for example is a valuable means of embedding and/or calling into question the outcomes of the project. These outcomes are only a provisional representation of states of mind at a specific point in students' personal development and should be reflected on retrospectively through coursework if possible.

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Reflection/any other comments

QA question: Is/was that the best way to do it? Why/why not? What improvements or adjustments are needed?

There is a danger that the questions and responses elicited by the students remain superficial and uninformative. It is important that students be told to compose questions which explore the informants' perceptions of the causes or origins of the behaviours which they have noted. The difficulties they may have in answering such questions draw the attention of the students themselves to the issues involved in identifying the causes and effects of cultural phenomena. These are issues which they should be required to explore through subsequent coursework.

Further details

e.g. web links; relevant references/publications; alternative contact names

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Related links

The Big Five Personality Test.
www.outofservice.com/bigfive

Coleman, J. (2004). Residence Abroad.
www.llas.ac.uk/resources/goodpractice.aspx?resourceid=2157

IALIC: *International Association for Languages and Intercultural Communication*.
www.ialic.arts.gla.ac.uk

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SIETAR: *Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research*
www.sietar.org.uk

Talkington, B. & L Lengel (2004). A Snapshot of intercultural communication courses: an international analysis.
www.llas.ac.uk/resources/paper.aspx?resourceid=2047

Work and Study Abroad.
www.llas.ac.uk/materialsbank/mb027/index.html