

Iceland and Scotland – small countries working cooperatively

Dangerous Ideas will be discussed by Guðrún Pétursdóttir from Iceland and Cherry Hopton around the Metaphysics of Teaching – the unquantifiable motivator of friendship and respect'



It is often proposed that adherents of 'target culture' know the cost of everything and the value of nothing. We propose that one of the key elements of teaching and learning is that which cannot be counted or measured empirically – the magical element of how relationships, respect, motivation can collide and improve the experience and efforts of both teacher and learner – and teacher as learner.

Using our own friendship as a template we will discuss how important it is to find like minded others to act as sounding board, support, fellow enthusiast and how the wider community of educationalists may provide such relationships.

The work that can grow from such partnerships is greater than the sum of its parts. Tending to an idea or a project ceases to be work. How can we grow such relationships within a culture that is focussed on targets, products and the production of evidence and how do we convince our organisational leaders to pay attention to the relationships between people in as much detail as they attend to the relationships between MIS systems.

Cherry and Gudrun first met 9 years ago when Cherry attended an ICI course on Co Operative Learning. Since then they have worked on a range of projects and courses, shared ideas, exchanged friends and family members, travelled but most of all spoken about students, teaching and learning. Cherry's students are now all Icelandophiles and Gudrun's trainees watch Cherry's students in action on film. When in doubt we skype, email, text, phone or visit!

One of the key aims of our teaching is to explore the ideas of interculturalism – the proposition that it is interest, empathy, commonality of ideologies not ethnic background that binds us. Historically we have been encouraged to view people outside our own ‘group’ as ‘other’ – even when attempts are made to acknowledge other groups it is often via ‘cultural events’ - which often rely on stereotypes.....’Here are some Mexican students – look at their ponchos’. Our experience and belief is that you are equally likely to find people on the same page as you outside your ‘group’ and the diversity of experience is a benefit rather than a problem.

The principle of human connections which cannot be meaningfully quantified is equally applied to students/students and students/teachers.

Key ideas:

- Co operative learning
- Diversity as benefit
- Inter culturalism
- Human relationships
- Critique of target culture

Cherry Hopton has been course leader for social science at Dundee and Angus College for 12 years. She has lectured in Social Sciences for around 20 years in various locations including New College Nottingham, Leeds University and South East Essex College. For the past 8 years she has been working closely with Gudrun Petirsdottir of Intercultural Iceland in the area of Co operative Learning and various educational research projects in addition to her role at D and A. Cherry has provided training in co operative learning in Iceland, Belgium, Greece and the UK. Co operative learning by its nature leads to creative and diverse outcomes or products hence her involvement with creative learning projects and diverse assessment methods.’ Ask her what her dangerous ideas are for education!

Guðrún Pétursdóttir finished Master degree in sociology from the Freie Universität Berlin in year 1990. Beside sociology she also studied intercultural education at the Institut für interkulturelle Erziehung at the same university and later finished the teacher’s qualification at the University of Iceland. For the last 15 years Guðrún has worked in different fields connected with migration issues and teachers training and has since 2003 ran the intercultural centre InterCultural Iceland (www.ici.is).

She taught courses at the Teachers University during the years 2003-2005 and at the pedagogical department of the University of Iceland from 2006-2009. She has run Grundtvig/Comenius In-service training courses for teachers and educators since 2004, developed cooperative teaching methods and materials and she is the author of two books: Intercultural education (1999) and Everyone can do something nobody can do everything; a practical handbook for teachers (2003).