Curriculum
Design Pattern

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Global Learning by Design

Name of Pattern	**Transnational Virtual Teams**
Date	December 2014

Abstract

This project aims to build cultural confidence and intercultural understanding between RMIT students situated in two different countries. The purpose of the transnational project is to promote collaboration and conduct the same learning activities across both locations.

The pattern captures the process for enabling effective communication between staff and students and successful timetabling across two international locations / different semesters. It also captures the technologies used to support asynchronous and synchronous learning

Rationale

In addition to building cross-cultural confidence and understanding, the pattern aims to reveal through direct experience the challenges associated with working across distance, time zones, cultures, languages and business behaviours. It is focused on experiential learning and this is reinforced through reflection on the experience.

The pattern is designed to have students understand issues and develop capacity to work through problems encountered while working across cultures/countries, while at the same time developing resilience and cross-cultural competency.

Learning Context

Students are situated in two locations and the student profile and learning delivery mode varies according to the location.

Learning Design

Working together as a transnational virtual team on a specific case study project allows students to develop practical skills that will be useful in a future work environment. This project enables students to experience an international real-life scenario and to deal with actual international challenges. As a result of this project, they can claim an improved understanding of complex dynamics as well as flexibility and emotional intelligence. Students learn how to handle language barriers, how to effectively plan and manage their time (including different time zones), and how to rely on international counterparts to gather data and share information.

This project requires communication between teaching staff in two locations, between students in two locations, and between staff and students in two locations/countries

Prior to Semester:

1. Address any timetabling issues between the two locations/countries. For example, is a staggered start/finish required to ensure collaborative and synchronous learning can occur between the students in the two countries?

2. Develop support materials for teaching staff and students to address the requirements of the transnational project. Ensure these support materials are distributed in both locations before the semester commences).

3. Conduct staff development activities in both countries:

    a. Provide necessary teaching staff training at least four weeks prior to semester commencement and conduct weekly teaching team meetings.

    b. Conduct weekly Skype meetings between teaching staff in both locations

4. Set up Blackboard discussion board in a program shell for to enable students in both countries to contribute to and to share information throughout the course.

5. Determine 'host' country - that is, determine which of the locations/countries will be the location where the organisations utilised as the basis of the real-life learning situation will be based. This will impact on the tasks that virtual team members are assigned in each country.

During Semester:

Note: Teaching staff activities to be conducted throughout the semester:

— Weekly meeting of teaching staff in each country to review their work and student learning.

— Weekly Skype meeting between teaching staff in both locations to discuss communication, perception, understanding and execution issues etc.

Week 1

1. Students commence transnational virtual team project in Week 1. All students are provided with an explanation of the requirements of the project (briefing) and an assessment guide.

2. Assign students to transnational virtual groups and provide with contact details of their team members in the other location.

3. Virtual team members 'meet' via Skype meeting. The initial Skype team meetings are held to establish a psychological contract between team members/students in each country in order for them to function as a single virtual team. The aim of the meeting is to:

   a. Introduce students to each other

   b. Plan for the case study project

   c. Allocate the workload to group members

   d. Select one team leader to act as a facilitator and mediator during the course

   e. Establish a psychological contract between team members.

4. Students start work on Assessment Task 1:

   a. Team members in 'host' country conduct an interview with an organisation representative and produce a 10 minute video about their chosen organisation.

   b. Team members in the other country produce an individual reflection report. (Assessment Task 1: 10%, due Week 5).

Weeks 1-6

5. Weekly reflection discussion and report:

    a. Each week two students from each virtual group lead a discussion, based on the groups' reflections for the week.

    b. This discussion is then written up and posted to the Blackboard discussion board (up to 300 words per reflection).

    c. The students swap the lead role each week to ensure all students are involved.

    d. Students are also required to summarise the project regarding key aspects of the project, what they have learnt from the project, and challenges faced as part of the project.(Assessment Task 2: 10%, i.e. 2% per week/ weekly report by 5 weeks).

6. Virtual teams work on the project and share information:

—   Students in one location focus on industry engagement - students are required to collect data from a selected organisation, while students in the other location focus on research and conducting an organisation analysis.

—   The analysis by the students in one country, combined with the organisational data collected by the students in the other (host) country, will be used as the basis of the assessment task response/project report content.

Week 5

7. students submit Assessment Task 1 (video or individual reflection report) for assessment.

Weeks 6-12

8. Working in their virtual groups, students commence preparing and writing their project report (Assessment Task 3: 40%, due in Week 12).

9. Conduct a mid-semester survey to obtain student feedback on the transnational virtual team project. This feedback can be used to make improvements to the current learning process and future transnational virtual team projects

End of Semester

10. Exams are undertaken in both locations following the transnational virtual team project (Assessment Task 4: 40%).

Summary of course assessment:

Assessment Task	Weight	Submission Date
Assessment Task 1: - Host country - Team members conduct an interview with organisation representative and produce a 10 minute video about the chosen organisation - Other country - team members produce an individual reflection report	10%	Week 5
Assessment Task 2: Virtual teams provide weekly reflection report each week for 5 weeks	10% (i.e. 2% per week by 5 weeks)	Weeks 1-5
Assessment Task 3: Virtual team provides final report on their project findings	40%	Week 12
Assessment Task 4: Exam paper for completion by individual student	40%	End of semester exam period
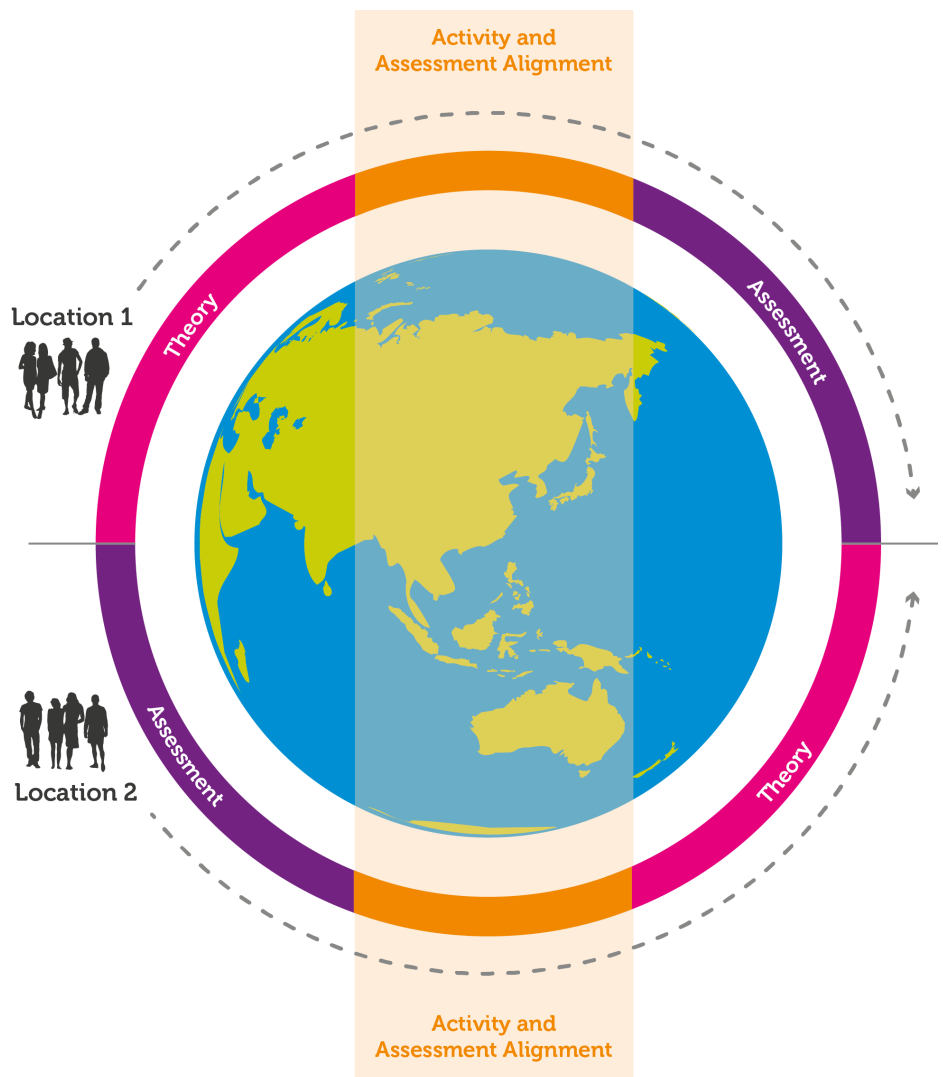
Challenges

Technology: Challenge associated with ensuring synchronous and asynchronous communication between locations. To overcome any technical access and communication difficulties consider:

— creating a shared Blackboard to use with both locations

— planning and organising all communication details with the IT service well in advance to ensure all communications are functional, fully operational and accessible prior to course commencement.

RMIT policy of late enrolment: Due to university policy that allows students to enrol into some courses up to and including Week 3, late enrolment students may miss out on the first few weeks of the virtual team project and associated project tasks. This poses a significant challenge for any group work. To address this challenge teaching staff need to maintain a degree of flexibility in terms of the need for extensions for submission of the team project report.

Different teaching structure and time: As students from both campuses/countries are required to work collaboratively on a cross-national virtual team project, working in real time may pose a significant challenge. For example, Vietnam has three semesters per year and Melbourne has only two semesters per year. This means there are only six weeks that overlap between the two campuses and therefore the collaborative element of the transnational virtual project has to be run across those six weeks. The challenge of different teaching structure and semester timing in different countries means that course co-ordinators and teaching staff need to work closely together to schedule when and how collaborative, synchronous learning occurs. Significant time and effort may need to be applied to course timetabling.

Working across different time zones: The time difference between the two countries may pose a challenge for teaching staff and student communications. Teachers and students in both countries need to be flexible and work together closely to find meeting and working times that are suitable for both parties

Conditions

— Availability of industry partners: A key requirement of the transnational project is that students in the 'host' country need to conduct face-to-face interviews with the organisation. This can be a problem if there are not enough organisations for all the virtual project teams. If possible, the RMIT industry engagement department should assist students to get in contact with suitable organisations.

— Flexibility in communication tools: Students need to have the flexibility to choose their own means of telecommunication. It may not be appropriate to select a single, unified tool as different virtual teams may find different types of technology suitable for communicating with their team members in the other country. For example, teams may choose to uses Skype, Google Hangout, Google Docs, emails, Facebook etc.

— Staff understanding of challenges: It is crucial that professional staff understand the challenges associated with conducting transnational virtual projects and that they are committed to achieving successful outcomes.

Resources/Technology

Technology resources
Blackboard How-To
Skype Basics Quick Reference Guide
Google Hangout How-To

Case Studies

Transnational Virtual Teams - School of Management

Outcomes

This project provides students with an opportunity to work on a cross-national virtual team project. They develop soft skills, cross-cultural understanding, problem solving skills and conflict negotiation skills. These are all skills that employers look for in potential employees. Providing students with these skills will improve their chances of securing a graduate position.

The project provides an engaging student experience as it is designed to encompass weekly reflections, group reports, case studies and virtual teamwork activities. This approach allows students to actively engage with their own team as well as receive support and close guidance from the teaching staff.

Evaluation

1. Mid-term evaluation conducted in tutorials to collect individual student feedback.
2. Face-to-face session for all group leaders to provide feedback.
3. Teaching staff feedback collected through weekly meetings and summary meeting in Week 12.

Related Category

Peer feedback, global, cross-cultural, team