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STUDY VISIT TO NEWHAM COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION

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RATIONALE – Aim of Study Visit

The aim of the study visit was to experience a practical example of interlingual and intercultural management of education. This report summarises the experiences and impressions of the study visit to Newham College, a practical example of managing a variety of diversity dimensions next to gender within adult education, with embedding reflections about transferability of the concept of "the learning revolution" into other fields of adult education.

BACKGROUND OF NEWHAM COLLEGE

London Borough of Newham

Newham is an area of extreme deprivation, being one of the most deprived boroughs in Greater London and in England. Unemployment in Newham, at 7.8 percent, was nearly double the rate of 4 percent for London as a whole. In addition, 36 percent of people were economically inactive, compared to the 25 percent average for London. Census information shows that 16 percent of Newham families are one-parent families and the rate of unemployment and other indicators of deprivation make most of Newham eligible for special assistance for the EU's objective 2 programme.

Newham is also one of the most diverse communities in England. The 2001 census recorded that 60% of the local population were from ethnic minority groups compared with 20.2% for London as whole. Over 80 languages are spoken in Newham's schools and data from the Benefits Agency and the Health Authority indicates that there are at least 15,000 refugees from 20 different countries living in the borough.

NCFE's Vision

The College has a vision of a "learning and skills revolution spurring local economic and social regeneration and full participation of local people". The College's mission is "to expand and improve lifetime learning", and it aims to achieve this by making open access provision (governed by an explicit learner admissions policy) that is relevant to the diverse range of needs in its local communities.

College Profile

This, together with highly challenging nature and extent of local needs, places the College at the cutting-edge of the widening participation and social inclusion agendas for which its response has been acclaimed. In 2006/07 individual student enrolments numbered 12,704, 55% female and 45% male. More than 79% lived in areas of high social and educational deprivation, 66% were from ethnic minority groups.

The College is widely acknowledged as providing innovative training with a strong focus on employer partnership. It provides a very diverse and customised curriculum which identifies and addresses the needs of individuals, local communities and employers. Recognition of the spiritual and faith needs of the great diversity of students is clearly evident in the effective implementation of the secular policy. All users of the college benefit from the innovative approach to campus management which ensures a safe, secure and healthy working environment. Students are actively encouraged to express their views about all aspects of the college's provision. Students are represented on all major committees, including the Academic Board and the Governing Body. The Governors' Student Consultative Committee meets regularly to discuss and exchange information on matters related to the college's strategy and teaching and learning. Each group of students is entitled and encouraged to elect a course representative. The representatives are trained and form the Student Council, which informs and works alongside the Student Union. Course representatives are also entitled to attend course team meetings. College managers meet with Student Union officers and student representatives on request, although this is to be formalised into regular meetings.

The college encourages complaints and suggestions from students as a way of identifying and resolving issues of concern.

Educational and Social Inclusion

The comprehensive equal opportunities policy is fundamental to the college's mission and strategic aims. It works actively and energetically to ensure equality of opportunity for all, in employment and service delivery. Specific management strategies have been developed to combat all forms of discrimination and harassment.

The college is committed to social inclusion: widening access, removing barriers to learning and serving the needs of under-represented groups. The college is also committed to working towards equality of opportunity in its employment policies and practices. The proportion of ethnic minority staff has increased significantly and an Equality and Diversity Steering Group has been instituted which has general oversight of the effectiveness of relevant policies, procedures and action plans. The college recruits students from all local ethnic minority groups and a Race Equality Action Plan is in place.

Gender

The college has almost equal numbers of male and female learners, and monitors performance by gender. The college is highly effective in addressing many aspects of the educational and social exclusion that characterises the local area. The mission and strategy of the college, including the commitment to an open access admission's policy, have provided the foundation for a comprehensive set of policies, systems and actions to address the very pervasive social and economic exclusion issues in Newham and other parts of east London. A Gender Equality action plan is in place and is reviewed by the Equality and Diversity Steering Group.

The college has an exceptionally high representation of ethnic minority students, reflecting the local context. The gender balance in the college as a whole is about equal and on most courses reflects the national situation or the situation within the relevant industry. For example, the percentages of women students on engineering, construction and IT courses and male students on care and hair and beauty programmes are low. The college Executive Board has a majority of female Directors comprising seven women and five men.

The opening of the first purpose built women's business centre in England recently has enabled the college to reach out to a range of new communities and women within those communities who would not have been able to access 'mixed gender' provision. Mainly funded by the college it shows a key commitment and vision of the college to the women's agenda. Eighty-three percent of the women who have used the services of the WBC are from minority ethnic backgrounds with the majority from Pakistan or Bangladesh. The impact this can have within families and on family income is immense as is the ability to raise the status and confidence of these women in their families and communities via self employment, starting their own business or gaining employment.

Sexuality

A Sexual Orientation Equality Scheme Action Plan is in place. Discrimination within the college based on learners' sexuality is also monitored and if discrimination is found it is acted upon. The college's work on sexual equality has been acknowledged through the Stonewall Award.
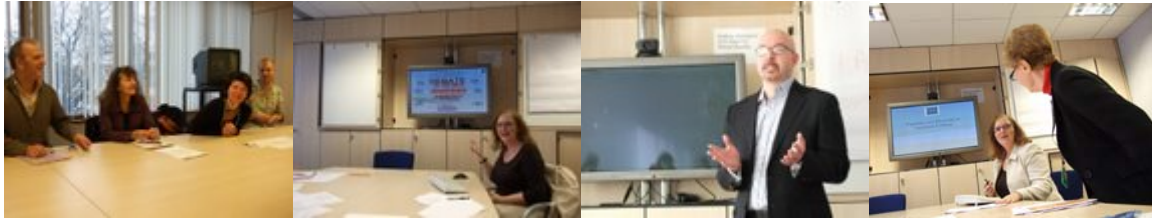
STUDY VISIT PROGRAMME

A programme was prepared that would give participants as broad and thorough introduction to the college as the short time available would permit. The participants in the study visit were given presentations on the activities and policies of the college and visited the two main campus sites. They were able to sit in classes. Presentations were made by senior staff including a professional learning advisor who gave a full description of the role of the PLAs. The presentations were given by college experts in the particular areas.

Following the visit the participants completed a questionnaire with their comments on what they had learned about Newham College, its policies, students, staff and achievements.

On the first day the participants were welcomed by Diane Gowland, Director of the Centre for Innovation and Partnerships who gave a brief description of the wide variety of projects and activities undertaken by CIPs. Linda Toms presented the first session on diversity in Newham College, with an overview of the college, the local environment, and the legal framework within which Newham College works. This was followed by a presentation on the challenges presented by gender- and ethnicity-specific projects from Andrew Mitchell, CIPs Marketing Manager. In the afternoon a visit was made to Stratford Campus where participants had a brief tour of the campus and visited some classes. Nuvit Hussein, a Professional Learning Advisor, gave a very detailed explanation of the work of the PLAs and answered questions from the group.

On the second day the participants met at the East Ham Campus where they were given a tour of the Campus and met with senior staff. They also were able to go into some classes. The Faculty Director of Foundation Studies, Shagufta Shahin, met with the group in the afternoon and an interesting discussion took place about diversity.

The last session consisted of evaluation and feedback.

Following the study visit the participants sent their impressions back to the college coordinator and these comments form the basis for the remainder of the report. It is not possible to include all individual comments so for the sake of clarity the comments are an adapted version.

1 Dimensions of diversity
- **regarding students**
- **regarding teaching staff**

On visits to both main Campus sites the visual impression gained by the participants included:

A first impression was that male and female students at the college, in general, were represented in equal numbers. However, the attraction of certain vocational fields differs between female and male students. So mostly female students were observed in hairdressing, beauty and complementary therapies, and mostly male students in the field of electronic entertainment, construction and mechanics. However, in the language classes both male and female students were equally represented.

Concerning the organisational dimension and external dimension they found it hard to say as they were only visiting for a short time and so were not able to get to know students. However, they did meet with some staff and there were opportunities during the programme to ask questions.

Regarding students and teaching staff the participants found dimensions of diversity were evident to them: gender, race, age and ethnicity as internal dimensions and appearance as external dimension. Initially the students and also the staff seemed to be very diverse, but there was neither enough time nor the opportunity to look behind obvious things.

The dimensions of diversity experienced regarding the students were especially: age, gender, ethnicity, physical ability, race, appearance and the working field at the College. It appeared possible to gather from appearance and clothes their religion and their educational backgrounds by the classes some students are enrolled on (for example study a literacy class). But these are only subjective conclusions and may be false, as they could be stereotyped or influenced by personal working experiences.

Regarding the staff they realised that, particularly the persons they came into contact with, they were very different relating to race, ethnicity and, as far as they came to know it, to their educational background. Apart from this, they were similar in their appearance, age, physical ability, behaviour, presentation and most of them were women (chance or intention?).

Different ethnic groups, physical abilities, age groups, and genders were visible but sexual orientation cannot be told; many other dimensions from the figure below neither. Teachers were (of course) a bit older than many students, but they found it interesting to see so many different ethnic groups represented within the teachers as well as the students.

Regarding students:
- At the internal level it is easy to see gender, age, race, ethnicity, physical ability, however sexual orientation is more difficult to observe.

- In the external dimension is more difficult to observe but it is possible to identify some aspects like religion, geographic location, marital status, appearance, educational background.

Regarding teaching staff
- At the internal level the same dimensions as regards students
- In the external dimension the same as regards students

Strong "dress codes" on visualizing ethnicity could be seen as a sign for a low demand on assimilation.

Participants were impressed by the high ethnic diversity within the staff of the college, and became aware that many members of the management staff are female and non native speake

2 Impressions and ideas regarding diversity*:*

Which educational approaches are used at Newham College to deal with all the differences among the students?

The impressions gained by the participants included new ideas/strategies for incorporating change in their own institutions and methods.

There was a strong impression that Newham College's approach tries to get as close as possible to the needs of the students: for example, blocks of courses, interactive way of teaching and learning, all the counselling and tutoring, extra curricular activities. Rules seem to be an important dimension concerning dealing with diversities: eg if you want to deal with so many diversities, one way is to set up the rules. Students are encouraged to develop their personal skills as well as professional competences through the tutorial system.

Impressions noted included

- *A strong message was received that Newham College welcomes anyone who wants to study there: to study is the connecting link (join the learning revolution)*
- *There is a wide range of courses, so that everybody can profit and get what he or she needs*
- *It is obviously written down what you can expect from the Newham College as a student (what kind of effort)*
- *the rules of behaviour are also clearly declared and obviously written down*
- *student union, individual supportive surrounding, student activities are welcome (be political, be an active member of different organisations)*
- *the standard of teaching and learning is monitored (PLAs)*
- *cooperation with business organisations (job opportunities) and other colleges*
- *innovative projects*
- *you are motivated and have a chance to learn, and it is a stepping-stone for integration, self-confidence and careers*
- *It is a pity that we did not get information about educational or training methods*

As we heard, respect and tolerance might be important values that guide the organisation's approach towards differences among the students, the secular orientation as well. The various policies that are on the website are probably important points for orientation for the teachers. I gained the impression that the teacher's attitudes, values, and beliefs that

structure their behaviour is the most important resource to deal with any difficulties that may arise between students.

The college is an open space where students from diverse cultures, ethnicities, races, religions, gender can improve their education. The college respect these differences and make some rules in order to deal with it

For me the most impressing thing was the transparency of rights and obligations for each member of the Newham College society – no matter if student or staff. There is a strong focus on a mutual social contract based on the clear values of respect against differences and limitation of mutual convincement. There is a clear empowerment of the students to participate within democratic structures and join representative groups. The invitations to be an active member of democracy are published in the whole campus (students' charter, "have your say", "remember you have rights", code of conduct etc) and in the website. There is also a strong empowerment approach to be recognized for disabled people (we are not from another planet), for women (fight against domestic violence and rape), for sexual orientation (sexual health, he's my brother).

Also the rules relating to the mutual respect are published within the whole campus and seem to guarantee a minimum base of conflict reduction caused by different cultures of behaviour and habits. One of the most interesting approaches is the secularity of education – to see the college as a secular room where everybody is invited to be respected in his/her religion and culture but also to respect others and not to convince others.

For me clear rights and rules seem to be one of the most important factors for high diversity and a chance to avoid in-group and out-group mechanisms (leading culture and assimilated cultures) – a discussion we have in our own society

3 Impressions and ideas regarding gender:

Does gender seem to be the most important dimension, compared to other dimensions of difference? Or are there other, more important dimensions?

The general feeling from the participants was that:

Gender seemed not to be a very important dimension among other dimensions of diversity. It was felt that gender is lacking or somehow put on the margins of diversity (where race, ethnicity and religion are playing an important role).

They found it difficult to say if gender is the most important dimension or not. More important is the point of view and what someone is searching for.

The difference between gender and other dimensions of diversity is that gender is not as clearly marked as other dimensions of diversity. For me it is the dimension which spreads out to the others and influences them in an important way – comparable with a cross-section dimension.

Ethnicity seems to be the main category, but gender stereotypes may be basically similar in many of the ethnic groups. It is probably the concrete work in the classrooms can counteract stereotypes and foster mutual respect and tolerance, not only between ethnic groups but also between genders, sexual orientation and so on. Again, it is the teachers who put that into practice.

I think religion, ethnicity, race, educational background, income and class are dimensions very closely related with gender. It is difficult in diverse spaces hierarchizing some dimensions among others.

There was a lot of discussion about the ranking of the dimension gender, because a typical gender separation within the vocational training was recognised (eg: hairdresser and motor car mechanic), but we also recognised a couple of qualified, "strong" and self confident female managers with an ethnic background in addition - while in some other countries there is a high demand on gender policies for a long time and regardless there are only 10 percent females in the management staff of most organisations and nearly no one with the combination of an ethnic background. A question raised was does ethnicity/social class/educational background beat gender?

4 Conclusions

It appeared from the feedback that participants would have appreciated more time to spend with individual staff and groups of students to learn more in depth. However, there were comments (see appendix) and overall such an experience was very much appreciated.

One persistent question was the number of rules and regulations governing students and their behaviour. They also found lack of evidence of gender/sexual orientation.

"My conclusion is that – once more – gender is a multi-dimensional category and it can never be captured by one discourse: it is not possible to transfer the philosophy of "deconstruction of gender identities and roles" into social fields, where all identities of a person are endangered, the identity to be a full member of a society, to be an employee and a job holder, to be a migrant with or without citizenship, to have the right to vote or to live unregistered, to be a member of an ethnic minority or to be a member of the new society where one has immigrated, to be with or without money in daily life and to be dependent on a husband and depended upon for children's care, to feel black and beautiful or to feel segregated because of the colour of skin."

"So gender can only be put on these questions and related to them. Like the "pyramid of needs by Maslow", gender in a sense of equal opportunities could be first to get a better self esteem in the own gender identity or to get a job – even in a typical female or male dominated area - before challenging and deconstructing my gendered life model."

Two participants gave their comments regarding transferring outcomes into own institution and what the study visit meant for own gender work. These comments are found in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. At the end of the visit the participants split into 3 groups and recorded their comments. These are found in Appendix 4.
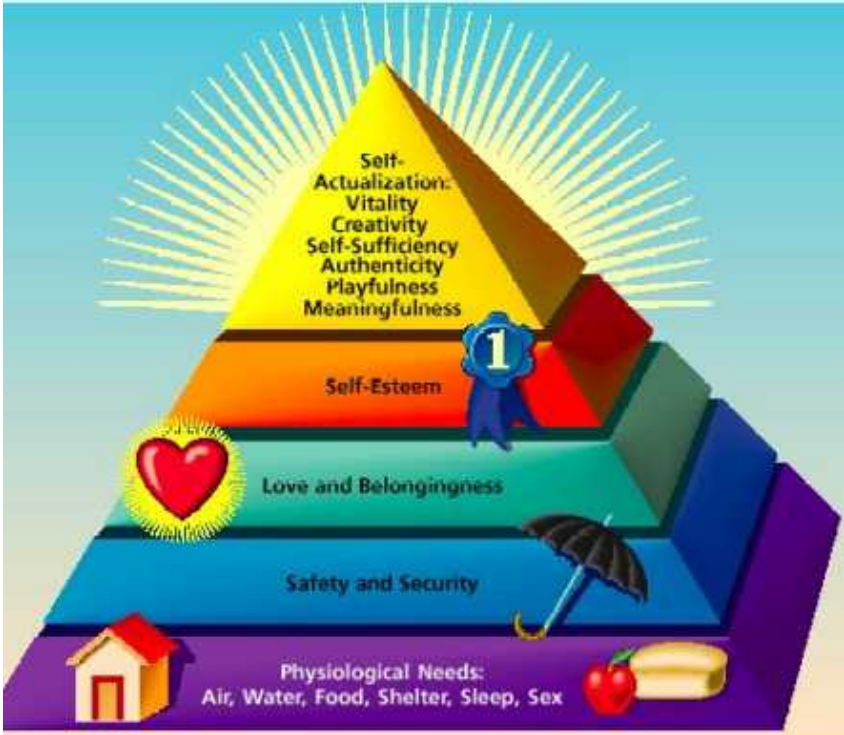
APPENDIX 1

Transfer and integration – A case study

Transferring outcomes into own institution

Diversity needs some basic rules on how to interact in the classroom.

Possible transfer outcome: If individual class rules are developed during the first week of a course, some basic rules could also be prepared by the trainers and added to the group rules.

Being a secular institution also means not to celebrate the festivals of one special religion, therefore having no "Christmas Holidays" but "Winter Holidays" and so on.

Possible transfer outcome: A renaming of course holidays could also be discussed in order to respect the different religions equally.

In "Her Business Centre" there is no basic funding, but in spite of that a high level of innovation and positive inspiring power can be observed. Strengthening women's self esteem is seen as crucial, and there is a good PR done about the image of the "working woman" - put a stronger focus on establishing a positive image of work in the female biography.

Motivation to work is dependent on possibilities of childcare and labour market, and also on motivation and inner beliefs including women's image in the culture.

In Newham College there is a special Centre for Innovation and Partnerships and also a strong cooperation with the regional economy.

Possible transfer outcome: Having a special fund/person for development and cooperation could be profitable.

Furthermore, we were able to observe some special didactic models that could probably be implemented. Some examples:

- **The portfolio method** could also be used, helping course learners to organize their course work and also to demonstrate their efforts in order to get a job. It would help them to assess their own work and therefore help them "learn how to learn".

- **The "professional learning advisor model"** could help course trainers to facilitate teaching and to combine group work and single work without additional time resources (supposing the existence of the necessary equipment).

- **The literacy method:** When we want our immigrants to write texts about a special subject, we could collect their opinions before and help them in finding the right vocabulary and their correct spelling on a flipchart before they start to write.

APPENDIX 2

Study visit reflection: What does it mean for our gender work?

Transferring inputs from the study visit for my own work as a gender worker:

- Cultural diversity <-> gender?
- Does respect change gender roles in society?
- Political interest has also to be fostered
- Whatever else you do - never disrespect other people ->
- Who puts the limits to respect?
- Does living diversity break hegemonic cultures
- Diversity hides single social categories
- We should implement material with more diversity aspects
- Not to change gender-roles but to respect roles and ensure contact/discussion about rules – respect – contact – circle
- To make a more level analysis, include more cultural differences
- Class - gender touch
  ethnicity - gender touch
  sexual diversity – gender touch
- Relating to reconstruction of gender roles - why not also reconstruct ethnicity roles?
- Marketing and PR: people should see their benefits in real life from gender training
- Gender training should always be connected to diversity training as a political vision. Long distance accompaniment in a company would be made
- How to ensure migrants have access to higher positions?
- We should integrate experts of other ethnicities into gender training
- Integrate diversity into my methods, including more class issues, ethnicity
- Foster more level analysis
- Take care for the topic ethnicity: more diversity in gender training
- Rules, respect and contact are important aspects for exercises, getting into contact
- Important for a general framework: where do class, ethnicity, sexual orientation touch each other?
- Positive inspiration for being a personal development teacher: teachers as role models for students - can one deconstruct ethnicity? This is an interesting thought...
- Marketing and PR: it was good to see so much energy! We should copy it for gender training
- Link gender and diversity training
- I would like to follow organisations like Newham College longer, e.g. 14 days, followed by gender training with the teachers

APPENDIX 3

FOUR LAYERS OF DIVERSITY

Source: From Lee Gardenswartz and Anita Rowe, *Diverse Teams at Work.* Burr Ridge, Ill.: Irwin Professional Publishing, 1994. *Internal dimensions and external dimensions are adapted from Marilyn Loden and Judy B. Rosener, *Workforce America!* Homewood, Ill.: Business One Irwin, 1991.

APPENDIX 4

The participants split into 3 groups and recorded their comments. They then gave a feedback with open questions.

Experiences/Highlights

Getting into contact with students, concrete group work "respect" as common ground
Credibility 'spirit', 'authentic' staff
Strict rules as a condition for diversity
Didactics: Portfolios (self responsibility) as well as tests
Special internal quality management
Visual outfit difference (group belonging)
Persons we have met at Newham College
Visiting classrooms
Fostering sexual diversity in website, curriculum
PLAs – Professional Learning Advisors
Open Learning (organisation, flexibility, architecture)
Intercultural school
Close relationship to labour market
Concept to get people to have a political opinion
Saw a colourful multicultural environment
Policy of different energies of diversities
Empathy of involved staff

Open questions

What is more important - value?
Higher value in practice (Gender/Culture)
How to manage in a conflict situation?
How to introduce 'respect' as a value
How can we teach 'respect'
How far may tolerance go?
Intercultural vs multicultural
Traditional gender behaviour among students
Correlation/relationship between diversity and security (rules)
Gender and cultural diversity – does respect change gender roles
Is this model really democratic and does it foster participation
How long is the list of regulations in the school
How are the regulations connected to the hierarchies and control
How can the concept work without so many rules
How to establish a supportive and mutual quality assistance of teaching
Where is gender, what about gender and diversity – the impact for teachers
Is enthusiastic engagement the entrance card for staff of the college

Feedback notes

Dress "codes" visible
Very good experience of lecturers
Respect in cultural diversity important
Gender and respect – how to improve gender relationships
Political interest
Gender action/gender balance in NCFE - more access for women to succeed – her business –
more women in hard hats, train the trainer for awareness
PLA policy – very good – positive
Flexible curriculum structure
Close relationship between NCFE and labour market – employers
Very positive – interculturality
Security and diversity – more need for rules
Does respect change gender roles/relationships
Democracy
To get political opinion
Multicultural environment – interesting experience
Multicultural diversity – acknowledgement by college – feel different energies
Empathy of staff – impressed

Open questions

How to manage diversity and security – how many rules
Are regulations connected with control
Rules – code of conduct and learning agreements
Quality assurance for teachers
Diversity gender training for teachers
Interviews – Genderwerks, example of why drop out
Gender roles will be changed - are there rules, contact, respect
Gender and class – ethnicity
Gender and diversity training go together
Personal development