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# Assessment, learning, teaching and internationalisation – engaging for the future

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The intersections between assessment, learning, teaching and internationalisation are important sites of engagement for students. Engagement, the extent to which students participate in purposeful learning activities, is frequently linked to the quality of student learning outcomes (Coates, 2005). It is here that the internationalisation agenda of universities connects with students who, as graduates, will take their place as citizens and professionals in an increasingly connected world. Engaging students with the internationalisation agenda of universities now will have an impact on their future lives and has the potential to have a broader impact on society. Thus it is timely that this special issue of the Assessment, Learning and Teaching Journal focuses on the theme of internationalisation. In this paper I will briefly examine the meaning of the term ‘internationalisation’ in higher education and then move on to discuss issues associated with assessment, learning, teaching and internationalisation.

## **Internationalisation and globalisation**

Internationalisation is not a new concept in higher education. Since the Middle Ages the ‘wandering scholar’ has been an integral member of the higher education community. However, over the centuries the shape and purpose of internationalisation in higher education has changed a great deal. It is a much debated and diversely interpreted concept that, it could be argued, is in a Foucauldian sense in a process of transformation (Foucault, 1978, in Danaher, Schirato, & Webb, 2000, p. 78). In the last two decades a number of definitions of

internationalisation in higher education have been developed and elaborated (see, for example, Knight, 1994; Knight and de Wit, 1995; van der Wende, 1997; Hamilton, 1998; Teichler, 2004). A common element in these definitions is to link internationalisation in universities with globalisation and with 'the intercultural' – the interface of different cultures and the need for appropriate and effective communication and behaviour at these sites of interaction (Deardorff, 2009; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). The concepts of 'global citizenship' and 'the global citizen' are also closely linked with the internationalisation agenda in universities particularly, but not only, in the UK (Bourn, 2010; Leask, 2008). A widely used definition of internationalisation is that of Knight (2004, in Knight, 2006, p. 13): "the process of integrating an international, intercultural and/or global dimension into the purpose, functions (teaching, research and service) and delivery of higher education".

Globalisation has been described as "those processes by which the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single world society, a global society" (Albrow, 1990, p. 9). This world society is, however, not one in which global resources and power are shared equally. Indeed, it is a commonly held belief that globalisation has contributed to increasing the gap between the rich and the poor of the world, and the exploitation of the 'South' by the 'North'. This domination can also be seen as 'intellectual', the dominance of Western educational models defining what is knowledge, what research questions are asked, who will investigate them and if and how the results will be applied. In various ways, globalisation has "transformed higher education throughout the world", propelling local institutions, their staff, students and their graduates "irreversibly into the world-wide environment" (Marginson, 2003, p. 2). For example, in the last 25 years we have seen rapid increases in the levels of mobility in the student population, the establishment of 'branch', 'regional' and 'offshore' campuses around the world, and rapid growth in the mobility of programmes (transnational education). In a globalised world those who were once far away are now our students, our colleagues and our neighbours. The boundaries between the local, the national and the global have been blurred and our future, collectively and individually, depends on how flexible, open and creative we are in the way we think, live and work.

While there is debate as to whether the internationalisation of higher education is a response to, a driver of and/or a contributor to globalisation, it is unarguably the case that globalisation has created challenges and opportunities for universities. The urgency of “making higher education (more) responsive to the requirements and challenges associated with the globalisation of societies, economy and labour markets” (van der Wende, 1997, p. 19) has been recognised for some time (Killick 2006, p.5). Nations and their peoples interact with each other now more than ever before. As the world has become increasingly more connected and more divided, the need to build “bridges of tolerance and respect for other cultures” (Kramsch, 2002, p. 272) through education has become more urgent. A major challenge faced by universities is to ensure that they promote and support “critical and independent thought alongside a strong values base of social justice” (Bourn, 2010, p. 27) in a world increasingly dominated by economic rather than human and environmental interests. International interaction and collaboration through education have the potential to develop cultural insight and exchange that is enriching and enabling for individuals, communities, nations and the world. It is important that we identify and address the issues associated with developing an appropriate range of knowledge, skills and attitudes in students as current and future contributors to the global knowledge society. In this society people and ideas are circulating rapidly, constantly and somewhat haphazardly (Appadurai, 1990, p. 296). Knowledge within and across disciplines is growing rapidly. The tools and resources available to assist in solving problems are expanding but at the same time the skills needed to thrive in this environment are constantly changing. The curriculum is an important site of interaction between people, knowledge, values and action in today’s world.

## **Internationalisation of the curriculum**

Universities have a responsibility to prepare all graduates to live and work in a global society. Internationalisation of the curriculum, “the incorporation of an international and intercultural dimension into the content of the curriculum as well as the teaching and learning processes and support services of a programme of study” (Leask,

2009, p 206), is a powerful way to expand the horizons of students beyond local, national and parochial concerns. One of the key concerns of internationalisation of the curriculum in some institutions is to ensure students graduate with the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to make positive, ethical contributions as citizens and professionals to their global, national and local communities. In preparing students to do this, universities themselves need to be outward-looking. Academic staff are charged with integrating the development of international and intercultural perspectives into the curriculum in a planned and systematic way. In this environment some argue that “the crucial factor determining the possibilities for intercultural dialogue within the student learning experience is academics’ attitudes towards, and the ways in which they understand, internationalisation” (Caruana, 2010, p. 30).

The engagement of students with internationally informed research and cultural and linguistic diversity, and the purposeful development of their international and intercultural perspectives, are key components of an internationalised curriculum. This occurs within disciplinary frameworks and professional practices which are themselves culturally constructed, bound and to some degree constricted (Childress, 2010, p. 31). Deep learning within this complex environment, in which the culture of the discipline provides the framework for international and intercultural engagement, requires co-ordination across a degree programme. It requires the incorporation of specific international and intercultural learning objectives in different components (e.g. subjects, courses or units of study) at different levels of study. Learning needs to be ‘scaffolded’ within the degree structure so that skills, knowledge and attitudes are acquired progressively and the achievement of high level learning outcomes is supported, assessed and assured. It is important that the activities associated with an internationalised curriculum, and in particular the assessment, teaching and learning that are at its heart, are as well planned, managed and monitored by discipline experts as any other aspect of the curriculum.

Assessment, teaching and learning are core components of the curriculum. The particular activities associated with them in an internationalised curriculum will be context-dependent. They will look different in different disciplines. But before moving on to discuss these matters in more detail it is important to clarify some common

myths and misconceptions and answer some common questions about internationalisation of the curriculum.

## **Some common myths associated with internationalisation of the curriculum**

First, internationalisation of the curriculum is not only, or even principally, about teaching international students. It is true that international students, wherever they are studying, require a curriculum that is internationally relevant and informed, that both connects with their previous experience and existing knowledge systems and extends the breadth and depth of their understanding. It is similarly important to ensure that the curriculum is accessible to *all* students. It is also true that the presence of international students may be a driver for the process of internationalisation of the curriculum and even a useful resource for those seeking to develop cross-cultural capability in their students as part of their approach to internationalisation. However, it is increasingly recognised that the mere presence of international students on campus does not constitute internationalisation of the curriculum, nor is it enough to focus our efforts in relation to internationalisation of the curriculum solely on teaching international students. Instead we must pay more attention to teaching all students well (Biggs, 2003), managing groupwork in multicultural classrooms (De Vita, 2005; Harrison and Peacock, 2010) and engaging all students in critical debate and dialogue about the current state of the world and possible futures (Bourn, 2010). Indeed, increasingly the use of the terms 'international student' and 'domestic student', and the polarisation this suggests, obscures the diversity within both groups. It is important to remember that we need to focus on teaching all students, regardless of their national or cultural background, to be critical and independent thinkers who are able to engage with the issues facing the world today.

Second, a common misconception is that internationalisation of the curriculum is the process associated with adapting a curriculum to be taught 'offshore', that is, in a country other than that in which it was developed and is usually taught. This view of

internationalisation of the curriculum typically associates it with modifications to content through, for example, the incorporation of 'local' case studies and sometimes with the adoption of different teaching processes to accommodate 'local' conditions, expectations and real and perceived differences in learning styles. The intended and actual learning outcomes may or may not include international and intercultural perspectives. The development of these perspectives may or may not be supported and assessed. The process of making modifications to the curriculum to ensure students are provided with appropriate opportunities to develop and demonstrate the desired learning outcomes in their local context is a process of contextualisation and 'localisation', rather than one of internationalisation.

Third, an internationalised curriculum is not an attempt to produce a curriculum that looks the same everywhere and can be taught anywhere to anyone. To reiterate, what we are striving for is a curriculum that will facilitate the development in all students of the skills, knowledge and attitudes that will equip them, as graduates, professionals and citizens of the world to live and work effectively in a rapidly changing and increasingly connected global society and in so doing to contribute positively to that society. The way this is done will differ depending on particular features of the disciplinary, institutional and national contexts within which students are engaging in learning and assessment activities.

## **Internationalisation of the curriculum in the disciplines**

Assessment, learning and teaching are at the heart of internationalisation of the curriculum (Jones & Killick, 2007). Turner and Robson (2008) argue that "each degree programme should incorporate an international dimension" (p. 72). Academic co-ordinators and their teaching teams control the curriculum; they define it and manage it and this means that it is critical that they are engaged in the process of internationalisation of the curriculum within their disciplinary and institutional contexts (Childress, 2010, p. 135; Leask & Beelen, 2010, p. 12; Egron-Polak & Hudson, 2010, p. 149). This requires, at the very least:

- understanding of the cultural foundations of knowledge within the discipline and practice within related professions
- definition and communication of the international and intercultural learning outcomes that students will develop across a programme of study
- teaching content and pedagogy informed by international research, experience and understanding
- learning activities focused on the progressive development in all students of international and intercultural skills, integrated across a programme of study
- assessment of student progress towards achievement of international and intercultural learning outcomes.

Each one of these elements of an internationalised curriculum deserves further discussion.

### **Understanding of the cultural foundations of knowledge within the discipline and practice within related professions**

Internationalisation of the curriculum has been described as an ‘educational reform’ that requires that we think differently about the universality of knowledge (Mestenhauser, 1998, p. 21). This in itself requires a meta-analysis of the curriculum undertaken from an interdisciplinary and integrative stance. Discipline knowledge is constructed and communicated through language which is itself culturally nuanced (Scarino et al, 2005). The meta-analysis should consider the role that culture plays in the construction of knowledge and how cultural nuances are reflected in and integrated into both the way the discipline is constructed and the way it operates. This in turn should be reflected in the syllabus, the learning outcomes, the organisation of learning and assessment activities, and teacher activity in an internationalised curriculum.



Carter (2008) provides an example of how this might be done in the science curriculum. She argues that in science education it is critical to examine “purposes, pedagogies and curriculum” (p. 629) and develop an alternative science curriculum that includes content focused on the way in which globalisation has resulted in the uneven distribution of science and a subtext of Western science and technology which privileges Western scientists, commercial interests and the privatisation of knowledge and has virtually eliminated purely curiosity-driven science. She argues that science education needs to address the fact that one of the unintended consequences of globalisation has been that “fewer nations, and fewer individuals, [are] working on more narrowly defined problems of Western science, controlled by a limited number of economically related interests” (p. 625), and that this has had a negative effect on many peoples of the world and on the environment. She envisages a curriculum that is better suited to the needs of socially, culturally and ethnically diverse learners and employs problem-based methodologies that prepare students to be flexible, adaptive and reflexive problem solvers who can conduct community-based as well as industry-based investigations and who “respect the great diversity, both natural and cultural, of our planet” (p. 629). Carter’s curriculum is based on a critical analysis of the connections between culture, knowledge and professional practice in science within a globalised world.

### **Definition and communication of the international and intercultural learning outcomes that students will develop across a programme of study**

One of the challenges of internationalising the curriculum is moving beyond traditional approaches focused on the inclusion of a few token international examples and teaching international students, to internationalised learning outcomes for all students which include the development of the skills, knowledge and attitudes required of graduates of ‘this programme’ in a globalised world. When defining intended and desired learning outcomes in the context of the discipline and related

professions it is useful to remember that “education goes beyond knowing to being able to do what one knows” (Mentkowski, 2006, p. 49), and it is important that the expectation to understand and use learning is made clear to students. In an internationalised curriculum this means making it explicit what international/intercultural skills, knowledge and attitudes will be developed and in what international and/or intercultural situations these will be applied. These might be both different and similar in different disciplines and professions.

For example, the international perspectives required of a nurse or a pharmacist will most likely focus more on socio-cultural understanding than those of an engineer, where the focus might be more on understanding the global and environmental responsibilities of the professional engineer and the need for sustainable development. They would all, however, need to be able to work effectively in multi-cultural teams. And while practising nurses, pharmacists and engineers should all be able to recognise intercultural issues relevant to their professional practice and have a broad understanding of social, cultural and global issues affecting their profession, the ways in which they will need to apply their learning, to ‘do what they know’, will clearly be different. Comparable differences exist between the international perspectives we might want to develop in for example, accountants and teachers.

Many universities around the world include descriptions of graduate attributes or qualities that incorporate the development of international, intercultural or global skills, knowledge and attitudes. The nature and application of these will be subtly different in different disciplines and professions, and these differences will be reflected in variations in learning outcomes across different programmes.

At programme level the following questions provide a useful framework for discussion:

1. What possibilities are there in this programme for students to explore the ways in which culture influences how knowledge is organised and communicated?
2. What possibilities are there in this programme for students to explore the

ways in which culture influences attitudes and approaches to professionals and their practices?

3. What international and intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes will graduates of this programme need in a globalised world?
4. Where will students get opportunities to develop these across the programme?
5. How will students demonstrate their learning and achievements in relation to 1, 2 and 3?

### **Teaching content and pedagogy informed by international research, experience and understanding**

One of the challenges of teaching an internationalised curriculum is to ensure that students engage productively with difference, including different ways of thinking, both within and beyond the classroom. Increasing student diversity provides both opportunities and challenges for teachers and students working within an internationalised curriculum. In institutions that offer opportunities for all students and staff to develop international and intercultural perspectives, international students are a valuable source of cultural capital (Jones, 2007, p. 25). Assumptions are often made in relation to how groupwork should be managed in culturally diverse classrooms. Research on the way in which multi-cultural groups actually work conducted over more than ten years has provided a body of literature that offers valuable guidance on the design of learning activities and the management of groups to achieve international learning outcomes (Chalmers & Volet, 1997; Volet & Ang, 1998; Smart, Volet & Ang, 2000; Maundeni, 2001; Briguglio, 2006; Kimmel & Volet, 2010; Osmond & Roed, 2010). Technology has opened up many new opportunities (Leask, 2004; Leask & Younie, 2001). Otter (2007) argues that education designed to develop students as global citizens has an important pedagogical implication – “that due attention must be paid not only to the knowledge and skills required in a global environment but also to the values that will enable students to transform the nature

of the societies in which they live and work so that they can fulfill their responsibilities as global citizens” (p. 53). It is vital that pedagogy is informed by international research in these and related areas.

Teaching that is informed by current ‘state-of-the art’ international disciplinary and pedagogical research and engages students with linguistic and cultural diversity to develop their international and intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes is an essential element of an internationalised curriculum.

### **Learning activities focused on the progressive development in all students of international and intercultural skills, integrated across a programme of study**

The provision of a variety of carefully planned and integrated learning activities which give all students the opportunity to develop international and intercultural skills requires that teaching teams work together to plan and evaluate student learning. In this way they can, collectively, ensure that key skills and knowledge learned in one module are reviewed and developed further in another so that at the end of the programme all students have indeed had sufficient opportunities to achieve their best.

All students require support in the form of feedback on progress. This needs to be provided at such a time and in such a way that students can use it to improve their understanding of, and their ability to apply, key concepts and to develop higher order skills in future activities. Providing cycles of practice and feedback in such a way that students can, over time, deepen their learning and improve their performance in key international and intercultural skill areas is essential in an internationalised curriculum.

## **Assessment of student progress towards achievement of international and intercultural learning outcomes**

Assessment drives student behaviour and can, but will not necessarily, enhance learning. Students largely study what they perceive the assessment system to require and “in many courses it has more impact on learning than teaching” (Gibbs, 2006, p. 23). Making explicit the assessment criteria related to the development of international and intercultural perspectives is an effective way to focus student attention and define expected performance levels.

Where the development of international and global perspectives and intercultural skills is conceived as an inherent part of scholarly study of a specific discipline, rather than as an optional or vocational extra, the expectations in relation to performance are easier to define and assess. This can lead to changes in the kinds of “performances of understanding” expected of students and corresponding changes in the criteria used to judge these performances (Barrie, 2004).

## **Conclusion**

Internationalisation and globalisation are closely connected and universities today have an important role to play in determining the future of the global community to which we all belong. An internationalised curriculum has the potential to make positive contributions to the future if it is focused on ensuring that students understand the cultural foundations of knowledge and practice, can engage productively with difference and are flexible, adaptive and reflexive problem solvers capable of, and committed to, exploring and resolving complex social and environmental issues. The provision of learning activities focused on the progressive development in all students of international and intercultural skills, knowledge and attitudes, and the assessment of student progress and achievement of these, are critical elements of such a curriculum. Teaching, learning and assessment will be distinctive and focused on ensuring that all students are both challenged and

supported. We cannot internationalise the curriculum without paying attention to the finer details of teaching, learning and assessment. Innovation, creativity, critical thinking and a capacity to think outside of traditional boundaries and challenge commonly held beliefs and existing paradigms are defining characteristics of students and staff in an internationalised curriculum.

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