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Beyond competencies and silos: Embedding graduate capabilities for a multicultural globalising world across the mainstream curriculum

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical analysis of key elements within the conference question as the basis for proposals for an inclusive and systematic approach to the development of mainstream disciplinary higher education curricula designed to meet the needs of students and societies in a multicultural globalizing world. The critical analysis considers key objectives, understandings and limitations of GII ‘competencies’, how we conceptualize ‘students’ within a globalizing higher education, how ‘effective’ strategies might be framed, and how internationalization abroad and at home might be re-envisioned in the era of the post-national university. The paper illustrates how this critical analysis points to the need to embed internationalization efforts, and their success indicators, within the mainstream curriculum across the disciplines.

Introduction

The neoliberal agenda in higher education (Rustin, 2016; Slaughter & Rhoads, 2000) encourages the development of ‘employability’ competencies which serve the individual student (and the employer) well, but which may contribute nothing to wider society, whether within local or global communities. President Trump and Prime Minister May have both decried the notion of global citizenship, thereby at least implying that cosmopolitanism has no relevance in their own world views or the

education systems over which they preside. In such contexts, educators committed to global social justice must assert their practice as an anti-hegemonic enterprise, requiring a clear vision of its mission, and a deep commitment to the development of their students and all those wider stakeholders who invest universities with a trust in their futures. Internationalization of the learning experience and its outcomes, variously referred to as ‘internationalization of the curriculum’ (IOC) or ‘internationalization at home’ (IaH) has for some time been seeking to introduce notions of global learning, global citizenship, intercultural competencies, global perspectives, and similar constructs into the learning experiences and outcomes of students in higher education. For convenience, these are referred to collectively as ‘GII competencies’ in this paper, alongside a critique of the term and proposals for how aspirations for student learning in and for a multicultural globalizing world be conceptualized. It should no longer be necessary to re-iterate the many studies which illustrate that both the recruitment of international students, and the laudable efforts to establish meaningful study abroad experiences for a small percentage and a limited demographic among our domestic students, continue to prove themselves unsuccessful in bringing GII learning to the vast majority of students. A similarly disappointing picture presents itself for those multicultural learning experiences which are accessed only by small numbers, and which remain non-critical to overall academic success. Each of these becomes more complex and even less impactful in a globalizing higher education where increasingly diverse students of a single institution may be studying for common awards across highly diverse social, political, cultural, and economic contexts - globally and locally.

Students, faculty, university administrators, policy-setters, and the wider public stakeholders most value disciplinary learning, and to be impactful, GII learning needs

to be embedded within the mainstream curriculum and its assessments. This Ideas Paper briefly sets out a critique of key areas under five questions below, before illustrating how the mainstream curriculum might be developed to support GII learning for all our students, whoever and wherever they may be.

Question 1 What objectives underpin the development of ‘GII competencies’?

A difficulty with ‘competency’ development is that it can be effective in enabling individuals to act solely for their own ends. GII competencies which serve to bolster self-interested graduates in pursuit of globally damaging or narrowly nationalistic objectives, surely, have no place within a higher education which values global social justice and sees its objectives as enabling its graduates to respond to the emerging, connected, and complex needs of the planet and its communities. GII competencies have the potential to be a significant enabler for such objectives, but their development, and the ways in which they are framed, need to be set within a critical pedagogy framework (Freire, 1970, 1972; Kincheloe, 2012) which is explicitly culturally relevant, expansive, and inclusive (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Question 2 What do we understand by ‘GII Competencies’?

There are multiple excellent examples of well thought-out taxonomies of GII competencies (CILT, 2009; Deardorff, 2008; Spencer-Oatey & Stadler, 2009). In their more simplistic presentation, competencies can fit easily with an outcomes-based paradigm of curriculum design, since they are observable and quantifiable. However, as suggested above, graduates *for* a multicultural globalizing world cannot be defined in terms of measurable GII competencies alone.

In my own modeling, I prefer the term ‘capabilities’, borrowed from Amarta Sen’s work (1993, 1999) as the measures of an individual’s freedoms to lead a life s/he has

reason to value in a multicultural globalizing world. In my understanding, having *reason* to value the life one leads requires reflection on that life, and means *at the very least* that it should be a life lived in ways which do not diminish the capabilities to others to also lead lives they have reason to value. Some freedoms are delineated by the individual's circumstances in the world (e.g. access to clean water and health services, rights to education and freedom of speech, absence of threats of violence or identity subjugation), others are dependent upon an individual's cognitive, affective, and behavioural capabilities – and can therefore be enhanced through 'good' education. I suggest that GII freedoms can be described as the capabilities to do something (act-in-the-world) and the capabilities to be someone (self-in-the-world), and that they are necessarily tightly bound to an individual's self-identity. The distinction between 'competencies' and 'capabilities' can be illustrated in GII terms by these indicative cross-cultural and global perspective capabilities, as set out in Table 1.

Table 1 Illustration of act- and self-in-the-world capabilities for global graduates (modified from Killick, 2018).

How I identify my action and disposition capabilities	<i>Act-in-the-world</i> capabilities <i>"I identify myself as being the kind of person who is able to:</i>	<i>Self-in-the-world</i> capabilities <i>"I identify myself as being the kind of person who is inclined to:</i>
Cross-cultural capability Which enables a graduate to work, enact his discipline, and live his	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reflect upon my own cognitive, affective and behavioural responses to the ideas, behaviours, and values of others; • modify my own communication in order to ensure others understand and are understood; • take a mindful stance when engaging with others; 	

life among diverse cultural others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accept that all cultural norms, including my own, are arbitrary and susceptible to critique; • critique cultural norms from a respectful and informed position.
<p>Global perspectives</p> <p>Which enables a graduate to see how her work, discipline, and life impact upon the lives of others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate how an action might impact upon the lives of others; • critique a policy or practice from the perspectives of peoples in diverse contexts; • locate and draw upon alternative data sources to gain a more complete understanding of an issue; • reflect upon how my own choices make differences to the capabilities of others to lead lives they have reason to value.

Question 3 Which students are we concerned with?

There is a tendency to focus internationalization activities around the experience of (i) majority students and (ii) domestic students. Advancing the causes of minority students tends to be seen as being enacted through multicultural learning centres, disability offices, or specific advocacy groups (e.g. LGBTQA+). International students are largely regarded, if they are regarded at all, as a resource for GII learning among their domestic peers, rather than as targets for or beneficiaries of any internationalization of learning initiatives *per se*. Diversity among international students is rarely given any attention, though there are certainly all aspects of diversity, all examples of privilege and disadvantage, all nuances of learning disabilities and of personal characteristics spread across this ‘group’ as any other. Current simplistic demarcations impoverish the work of all concerned. GII capability development needs to be situated as work which is *designed* to empower *all* students, and to do so requires a sophisticated, intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991) perspectives on domestic *and international* student diversity, and on the associated power differentials

between groups and individuals. In the post-national university (Killick, 2017), where students in Malawi, Nepal, the UK, and Brazil might be studying the same curriculum for the same award within their respective home institutions, academics and administrators need always to be alert to the potential for the ways they design and resource student learning to discriminate and disadvantage some within that complex milieu.

Question 4 What do we mean by ‘most effective’ strategies?

Given the discussions above, ‘most effective’ needs to be understood in terms of *what* is achieved and *who* has achieved it. Strategies which successfully developed expert skills in intercultural communication would not be ‘effective’ within the terms set out above if graduates deliberately utilised those skills to manipulate or exploit others. Strategies which successfully developed cross-cultural and global perspective capabilities as set out above would not be ‘effective’ if they did so only for a limited student demographic.

The ‘most effective’ strategies are those which achieve the greatest degree of desired outcome for the greatest diversity of students.

Question 5 What differentiates internationalization abroad and at home in the era of the post-national university?

The distinction here becomes blurred by a number of developments in global higher education. Where is ‘abroad’ and ‘at home’ for the different students enrolled on, example:

- On-line courses¹ with participating students accessing them from more than one country.

¹ Here I am using the term ‘course’ to mean any accredited unit of study from a module through to a whole degree programme.

- Courses delivered to students at a university's overseas campus.
- Courses franchised to partner institutions overseas.
- Courses which are accessed by 'overseas' students at their home university for some periods and at a host university in a country which is foreign to them for other periods.

I suggest the distinction has outlived any usefulness it had. The internationalization of the student learning experience, in ways which impact equitably upon all students, wherever their physical location, is the objective of a higher education which has global reach and global impact.

Review of the conference question

The discussions above have allowed me to articulate why I would modify the initial question along the lines of:

Which internationalization strategies are most effective in developing GII outcomes which enhance all our students' capabilities to lead lives they have reason to value in and for a multicultural globalizing world.

I now suggest why and how strategies within the mainstream curriculum and those likely to be most effective (for all our students).

Mainstream curriculum

The only *effective* space for GII outcome development *for all students* is within their mainstream, disciplinary curriculum. 'Mainstream', refers to curriculum which is *required* for a student's progression and graduation. 'Disciplinary', refers to that curriculum which is focussed upon subjects *aligned directly* with a student's chosen field of study. The following are not part of the mainstream curriculum:

- An elective course;

- An optional (even if ‘for credit’) study abroad, service learning, diversity encounter, (etc) experience;
- Learning activities in which only some students engage with peers and perspectives which are somehow significantly different to themselves;
- A required course which lies outside the disciplinary field (e.g. a generic module in intercultural communication); or
- A learning activity (lecture, seminar, piece of groups work) within a disciplinary course which has un-assessed outcomes.

This is not to suggest that there is no place for the above, or that they cannot do valuable work for individual students, but they are not adequate and should not be prioritised because they are avoidable and/or are diminished in importance by their divorce from a student’s disciplinary focus. Since all students, at home and abroad, on-line and in our physical classrooms, study and are assessed through the mainstream curriculum, demonstrating achievement of the GII outcomes embedded throughout that curriculum becomes a requirement for all those who graduate *in order to graduate*.

Within the mainstream curriculum, the driving-force for learning and for the required assessment of that learning is its intended learning outcomes. Within the outcomes-based curriculum paradigm which currently dominates Anglophone higher education, this necessarily means that what we set out in our learning outcomes must be *measurable* through the assessments we design (Biggs, 2003). This is problematic for the kinds of capabilities illustrated in Table 1. We cannot measure how a student *identifies* herself, nor what she is *inclined* to do. We can only measure what she does. I cannot see that we have any choice but to accept this limitation. The question then

becomes, what can be done within the mainstream curriculum which is *likely* to develop these invisible GII outcomes we set out to achieve?

I suggest three related strategies:

1. **Embed** the critique of own and others' perspectives within disciplinary learning outcomes and assessments;
2. Create learning and assessment experiences within which **all students** engage with locally and globally diverse others in **exploring and critiquing** disciplinary perspectives and activities;
3. Engage all students in **critiquing the mainstream curriculum and their own learning** for its effectiveness in empowering them to act in

A brief discussion & illustration for each of these:

Embed the critique of own and others' perspectives within disciplinary learning outcomes and assessments

There is much discussion within internationalisation of the curriculum about the inclusion of *content* drawn from diverse sources and representing diverse perspectives. By calling for *embedding*, this strategy echoes calls within that discussion for diverse content to be more than 'add on'; it also firmly locates that content *within* the discipline, ruling out the more peripheral spaces indicated above. Most significantly, it puts the emphasis on what the students *do* with the content – developing and exhibiting the capabilities to critique several perspectives, including those of their own cultures, societies, and other in-groups, be they from a majority or a minority. Where a course is delivered to diverse students in diverse contexts, the students and the context should provide some of the specifics of the diverse perspectives to be engaged with. Diverse perspectives, though, do not depend upon having a diverse cohort – nor should they be limited to the dimensions of diversity

present within a cohort. A course delivered to a mixed Black and White cohort should engage perspectives from both groups (including their respective diverse perspectives) – but also from indigenous peoples, peoples in other continents, peoples with disabilities, peoples of other faiths/no faith, and so forth - whether or not they are represented within the cohort.

The capability to critique needs to build in complexity over time. On a three year undergraduate programme, learning outcomes might progress along the lines laid out below [illustrative ability]:

Year 1 Students will be able to [identify]:

Year 2 Students will be able to [analyse]

Year 3 Students will be able to [critique]:

...the differences and similarities between... [disciplinary examples]

[the use of cosmetics] [attitudes to dieting] [the public use of statistics]

[housing preferences] [renewable energies] [intellectual property]

[employment rights] [corporate finance] [public funding of the arts] [leisure

travel] [family affiliations] [violence in on-line gaming] [privacy] [priorities

for science] [palliative care] [etc.]

....within their own social group and two contrasting social groups.

In all cases, the constructive alignment process should then lead to the achievement of those learning outcomes being assessed, (with appropriate criteria developed to ensure that passing the course is contingent upon a ‘satisfactory’ level of performance), and to learning experiences being designed to enable students to demonstrate their learning.

Create learning and assessment experiences within which all students engage with locally and globally diverse others in exploring and critiquing disciplinary perspectives and activities.

Engaging with diverse others in meaningful activity is identified as an important factor for prejudice-reduction (Allport, 1979/1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). The same ‘contact theory’ also identifies ‘authority support’ and ‘equality’ among participants as key features of the contact situation. In this case, authority support is provided most clearly by making relevant capabilities an assessment requirement, while participant equality is enhanced by ensuring that students take on the role of expert informants (i.e. by validating their perspectives as a source of knowledge). By witnessing themselves and those who are like them successfully engaging in intercultural contact experiences, students are able to build their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) for future encounters (i.e. *I am the kind of person who can...*). The confidence of self-efficacy lends support to a positive attitude to engage (i.e. *I am the kind of person who is inclined to...*).

The students within the cohort, at home and overseas, provide a significant ‘resource’ for these kinds of activity – especially with the expanding possibilities for on-line study collaborations (Guth, 2013) across communities and continents. As noted, engaging diverse students as expert informants enhances their status and power. However, as also noted, it is important to engage with others whose perspectives might not be represented within the cohort – or within higher education more broadly.

Taking one example of a Year 1 learning outcome from the previous section:

Students will be able to identify the differences and similarities between the use of cosmetics within their own social group and two contrasting social groups.

Assessing this outcome signals to students that different peoples engage differently with cosmetics, and that the differences are socially/culturally normative, economically circumscribed, have historical influences, signal group memberships, impact ecologically, and so forth. By exploring the topic with members of other social groups, there is a need for students to articulate what are likely to be hidden dimensions to their own use (or non-use) of cosmetics, and to recognise that others, peers who are outside their selected community, can contribute to their own process of identifying differences and similarities. Others become people to *seek out* (face-to-face or virtually) and seek to understand, rather than people to ignore, misinterpret, or misrepresent.

The capability to ‘successfully engage with diverse others’ is indirectly evidenced through an individual student’s performance in the assessment of the stated outcome above. However, more direct assessment of this capability can be achieved through other variations on learning outcomes (I use the same one to illustrate the point, but a course would select a range of areas of knowledge and performance as appropriate to the discipline – i.e. *embed* these capabilities).

For example – students are often assessed on their presentation skills – so the learning outcome above might be structured to incorporate this:

*Students will be able to **give a presentation illustrating** the differences and similarities between the use of cosmetics within their own social group and two contrasting social groups.*

To directly assess one aspect of ‘successfully engage with diverse others’ which is relevant to giving a presentation, the above can be further modified:

*Students will be able to give a presentation **to an audience with diverse competencies in English**, illustrating the differences and similarities between the use of cosmetics within their own social group and two contrasting social groups.*

This particular modification makes speakers of English as a foreign language expert informants and raises awareness among those for whom English is their first language of their own responsibilities for achieving effective communication and successful encounters in a multilingual world. A second illustration would be:

*Students will be able to **conduct primary research** on the differences and similarities between the use of cosmetics **with research participants from** their own social group and two contrasting social groups.*

Engage all students in critiquing the mainstream curriculum and their own learning for its effectiveness in representing and empowering themselves and others to make their way in a multicultural globalising world.

A significant reason for this is to acknowledge that diverse students are better able to identify how *their* individual learning has been impacted by their experience on the course. Faculty are rarely well-placed to understand students whose identities and life-experiences are significantly different from their own; all the more so across the cohorts and contexts of the post-national university. Students become expert informants and partners in the curriculum design process.

Bringing this type of engagement into disciplinary learning also requires that students explore with others if/how different types of learning experience may impact differently across diverse peers, and what impact their own learning behaviours may have on those peers.

If this kind of engagement is embedded throughout the learning period of a course, students will develop capabilities to reflect *on* their experiences and their own feelings and behaviours during those experiences (reflexion (Archer, 2007)), and to also reflect *in* their experiences (Schön, 1983) concerning how they and others are interacting and impacting (a kind of mindfulness (Langer, 1989). All of which are key capabilities for ongoing learning and agency; by bringing those reflective/reflexive acts under a critical lens *with diverse others*, it may be possible to ameliorate the dangers of reflecting only from within a culture-bound mindset (Blasco, 2012).

Measuring the effectiveness of the internationalization of learning activities

Assessed student critiques, along the lines of those outlined above are, themselves, a significant measure of effectiveness at the individual level. Additionally, within the mainstream curriculum model of internationalization proposed here, the measurement of the effectiveness of those elements of GII learning which are measurable *across the whole student body* can be achieved through a review of student performance on those assessment components in which they are embedded. Such a review should interrogate student performance against a wide range of demographic factors – student nationality, first language, gender, ethnicity, disability, and so forth – to identify where courses might not be equitable in their design, delivery, and/or assessment features.

Effectiveness in developing the wider capabilities associated with identity and inclination are not susceptible to such direct measurement. I also doubt that they are measurable by quantitative research instruments, although I accept these are particularly popular in the USA. Hard-to-do, and harder-to-fund measures are needed, requiring qualitative, and comparative longitudinal studies which explore how graduates enact their future professional, social, and civic lives across the life-course.

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