INTERNATIONALISATION OF THE CURRICULUM: Concepts and Working Practices

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INTRODUCTION

This publication accompanies the IRIS Workshop ‘Internationalisation of the Curriculum’, held in November 2013. My intention, in writing it, is to enable you to engage with some of the broader issues that need to be considered in ‘internationalising’ the curriculum and to reflect on your own practice.

‘Internationalisation of the Curriculum’ or ‘Curriculum Internationalisation’ are terms that few people seem able to define and even fewer consider have anything to do with them (Leask, 2013). For that reason, although ‘Internationalisation of the Curriculum’ is the main focus of the publication, other issues that are fundamental to the ‘internationalisation of higher education’ are discussed in Part One. The definitions of internationalisation of the curriculum and ‘working practices’ proposed in Part Two are thus located firmly within empirical research and theoretical concepts prevalent in the field.

Blum & Bourn (2013, p.43) suggest that:

Central to higher education responses to globalisation is a need to identify and support learners in developing: (1) the skills to make sense of what is happening around them; (2) the ability to recognise diverse interpretations and viewpoints; and, perhaps above all, (3) the know-how to deal with uncertainty and complexity.

It would be difficult for any higher education practitioner to disagree that the development of these skills and qualities is central to the purposes of higher education – whatever the context - and irrespective of globalisation. It should be recognised, however, that globalisation has been, and continues to be, a significant, contributing factor in the changing landscape of higher education. It is this changing landscape that is the context for analysis in the publication.

The Centre for Curriculum Internationalisation (CCI) at Oxford Brookes University in the UK has a helpful website that explores many of the issues referred to in this publication www.brookes.ac.uk/services/cci The Centre establishes close links between curriculum internationalisation and the notion of a global citizen – as do I. Global citizenship is a contested term, however, that has both negative and positive connotations. It can be associated with the responsibility to act in the interests of social justice and, more negatively, with cultural imperialism (Mertova & Green, 2010). Throughout this publication, I acknowledge these tensions. Bearing in mind the contested nature of global citizenship, I find the Oxfam (2006) definition of a global citizen valuable. A global citizen is someone who:

- Is aware of the wider world and has a sense of their own role as a world citizen;
- Respects and values diversity;
- Has an understanding of how the world works economically, politically, socially, culturally, technologically and environmentally;
- Is outraged by social injustice;
- Participates in and contributes to the community at a range of levels from local to global;
- Is willing to act to make the world a more sustainable place; and
- Take responsibility for their actions.

It is this definition – and the values inherent in it – that underpin this publication.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Singh (2011) defines social justice as “the search for a fair (not necessarily equal) distribution of what is beneficial and valued...in a society” (p. 482). Drawing on a 2008 report by the European Science Foundation, which foregrounded the changing relationship between higher education and society, she highlights the connection made “between analyses of higher education’s role in contributing to overall social fairness and those relating to patterns of enquiry within higher education itself (e.g. equitable student access)” (p.484). As she points out, however, “the simple act of inclusion does not in itself bring about greater equality” (p. 491) nor does “the personal experience of an intercultural encounter ...automatically initiate intercultural learning” (Otten, 2000, p. 15). Internationalisation of the curriculum can initiate intercultural learning and thus engender a greater sense of social justice in all of us by celebrating and working with diversity rather than positioning it as problematic - as I have learned through my own research and experience as a higher education teacher in the UK and in several other countries. Those experiences will be drawn on, as appropriate, throughout the publication to support the analysis and to offer practical suggestions.

The publication is divided into two parts. Part One focuses on the current international higher education landscape, highlighting how terms such as globalisation, internationalisation, cosmopolitanism are used in the discourse, offering some definitions and untangling some of the conceptualising behind them. In Part Two, I discuss how the presence of students from different contexts, faiths, ethnicities, academic traditions needs to be reflected in curriculum design – content, teaching, learning and assessment approaches - and student support, proposing some practical ways to ‘internationalise the curriculum’.
Achieve more intensive and self-transformative international experiences. They want to bring an international dimension to the knowledge content of the curriculum, to enhance global skill-building and to improve intercultural relations in culturally mixed classrooms. They want to move from rhetoric and bland mission statements, to changing the nature of the education that everyone receives.

Yet, in spite of the ‘culturally mixed classrooms’ of 21st century higher education, there is still less attention given to the complexities of intercultural encounters and communication - the lived experiences of the participants - in those classrooms. Marginson’s claim that many institutions ‘want to move from rhetoric and bland mission statements to changing the education that everyone receives’, may, therefore, continue to ring hollow unless there are opportunities created for critically reflective conversations among those who populate higher education about their personal experiences of daily encounters. The classroom – physical/virtual - brings everyone together, hence the importance of internationalisation and its impact on higher education, in particular the creation of opportunities for increased mobility. The diversity of 21st century higher education can provide rich opportunities for developing “a more globalised sense of responsibility and citizenship” (Kahane, 2009, p. 49) and can prepare learners for a world that is interdependent and interconnected.

In Israel, as to some extent in the UK:

The international dimension can be complicated as the “other” or “foreigner” can refer to those who are not of the country’s majority population or to other nationalities from outside the country. The definition of an “international” versus “local” dimension is thus more complex among heterogenic, segregated populations (Cohen, ‘Yemeni & Sadeh, 2013, p.4)

and “a national strategy to internationalize may also interfere with local and institutional values” (Skröbis & Woodward, 2007 cited ibid). But, in any context, no matter how complex and politically charged, we need to understand what those local and institutional values – in this case the values of higher education - are. These may be stated in ‘vision’ or ‘strategy’ documents but the extent to which those who populate the institution subscribe to them, or are even aware of them, may be questionable. Focusing on ‘internationalisation of the higher education curriculum’ presents us with opportunities to examine the vision, mission statements or internationalisation strategies of our institutions and to debate the extent to which they reflect perspectives to which we can adhere. In addition, it challenges us to surface and crystallise our beliefs and values about learning and teaching – and learning and teaching within different disciplines - that are seldom subjected to scrutiny.

INTERNATIONALISATION? GLOBALISATION? COSMOPOLITANISM? LOCALISATION?

‘Globalisation’ is often used interchangeably with ‘internationalisation’ and, although they are “dynamically linked concepts” they are “different” (OECD, 1999, p.14), often inadequately understood and resisting simple explanation (Sanderson, 2004). Given the centrality of higher education institutions in the globalized world… the relationships between globalization and higher education seem to be acous, perplexing and open to multiple and divergent accounts” (Vaira, 2004, p.484). It is important to consider the meaning – or meanings - of ‘the internationalisation of higher education’, not least because the TEMPUS - IRIS project has this as a central tenet. Does it mean the integration of an international/intercultural dimension into all of the activities of a university, including the teaching, research and service functions (OECD, 1999) with the aim of achieving mutual understanding through dialogue with people from other countries (Yang, 2002)? Does the term simply mean increased numbers of students, ‘sojourners’ (Kiley, 2003) from countries other than the host country, who are studying in higher education? Mok (2003, p.123) adopts a more cynical perspective. By defining internationalisation of higher education as “market-related strategies such as…encouraging academics and universities to engage in business and market-like activities to generate revenue”, including the recruitment of international students, he asserts that it serves the interests of reducing the financial burden of the state.

I find it helpful to differentiate between internationalisation and globalisation by thinking of internationalisation as the “growth of relations between nations and between national cultures (in that sense internationalisation has a long history)”, and globalisation as “reserved for the growing role of world systems. These world systems are situated outside and beyond the nation state, even while bearing the marks of dominant national cultures, particularly American culture” (Marginson, 2000, p. 24). Moreover, Kreber (2009) proposes that ‘internationalisation’ communicates “an ethos of mutuality and practices geared at strengthening cooperation…by encouraging greater internationalisation across teaching, research and service activities, the quality of higher education can be enriched” (ibid, p. 2-3) – a definition that resonates with me and one that underpins my own work.

Otten (2003, p.13) proposes another dimension of internationalisation and globalisation, that of the “regional/local level of…domestic multiculturalism”. This more local perspective is embedded in the term “cosmopolitanism” by Caglar (2006, p.40). Similarly – and particularly pertinent within the context of international higher education - Cuccioletta (2001/2002, p.4) refers to “cosmopolitan citizenship…that recognizes that each person of that nation-state possesses multiple identities”, linking her/him to her/his own cultural heritage and the culture of the host country. Yet another term, ‘localisation’, “can be divided into the terms ‘global’ and ‘localisation’, a global outlook adapted to local conditions” (Mok & Lee, 2003, p.3). More recently, the terms ‘global citizenship’ and ‘global citizen’ have become popular – as indicated in the introduction. It is my belief that, although it is valuable to be familiar with how these terms used to describe ‘cross-border’ activities are conceptualised, they have less significance than the importance of being clear about the assumptions and motivations that mediate constructive efforts to engage in the activities and processes.
INTERNATIONALISATION = INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS?

One reason why definitions of internationalisation continue to be contested is that a nation’s history, culture, indigenous populations and resources shape its relationships with other countries (Yang, 2005). In Australia and Canada, for example, the meaning of internationalisation is linked with their domestic multicultural populations and international higher education research extends beyond the relationship between their own nationals and those from other countries, to recognise the shifting and multiple identities of all individuals and groups (ibid). In Hong Kong, a context in which I teach, internationalisation is defined as:

A wide spectrum of issues, including curriculum design, research collaboration, international faculty mix; student recruitment, integration of all students on campus…The UGC sees internationalisation with Mainland China as the key to Hong Kong’s future and that it should be actively pursued by the UGC-funded institutions (UGC Annual Report, 2011-2012).

The term jiegui – connecting the smaller with the larger - is widely accepted as a crucial facet of internationalisation in higher education in China (Yang, 2002, 2005) and many Chinese academics seem to have sufficient confidence in their traditional culture not to feel threatened by internationalisation (ibid). This confidence may reflect “the remarkable capacity of Confucian culture to accommodate other cultures” (Hayhoe, 2005, p. 582) or a naivety about the hegemonic effects of outside influences (Yang, 2005). In Malaysia, a country that is establishing itself as an education hub in the Asia Pacific region, the internationalisation of higher education is seen as a significant factor in increasing “Malaysians’ international awareness and developing a sense of national pride” (Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, 2011, p.23), as well as accelerating the country towards Vision 2020 and its aspiration to join the league of developed nations.

The ways in which increased numbers of international students can ‘internationalise’ the experience of local students and staff benefit UK higher education continue to be explored. A recent research project, funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2013), The Wider Benefits of International Higher Education in the UK is an example. There can, however, still be a gap between the marketing strategies employed by such organisations as the British Council, which promotes the opportunities for mutual understanding offered by the fresh and enriching perspectives of international students, and the experiences of academics and students (Trahar, 2011). In addition, the meaning of internationalisation still tends to be elided with international students. For example, in 2008, I was the project manager of a qualitative study funded by the UK Higher Education Academy (HEA), which investigated ‘Perspectives on Internationalising the Curriculum’. A question that we posed to focus group participants - academic staff and students from throughout the world – was ‘What do you understand by the term “internationalisation”?’? People would try to offer a definition but, very quickly, would resort to foregrounding ‘international students’ in the conversations, irrespective of whether they identified as an ‘international student’ (or academic) or a ‘local student’ (or academic).

The UK is second only to the USA in its ability to attract students from other countries. In 2011/2012, 16.8% of all students in UK higher education were defined as ‘international’ i.e. coming from outside of the European Union (EU) but at postgraduate level study. 69% of full-time taught postgraduates and 46% of all taught postgraduates were international, with 41% of all research postgraduates falling within that category (www.ukcisa.org.uk/Info-for-universities-colleges/Policy-research-statistics/Research-statistics/international-students-in-UK-H.E). The UK is the second most popular destination in the world for PhD researchers. Such students contribute more than £8 billion annually to the UK economy (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013).

The Teaching International Students (TIS) project: www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/subjects/escalate/7479_Teaching_international_studentsproject emerged from the UK Prime Minister’s Initiative 2 (PMI 2). It was a joint initiative of the Higher Education Academy and the United Kingdom Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA). In spite of the implications of its title, its aim was to provide guidance for academics on how to meet the diverse learning needs of international students in ways to benefit all students. You may find some of its resources helpful.

Some years ago the University of Bristol’s Graduate School of Education established a Learning Skills seminar programme. This programme was designed to support all students in their return to learning. The intention behind it was commendable in wanting to support in particular, international students to become familiar with UK conventions for studying, writing and producing assignments (De Vita, 2001, 2002). It was less common, however, for us to subject our own teaching and learning practices to critical scrutiny. We rarely questioned, for example, the validity of taking a ‘critical approach’ to study:

This thing we call “critical thinking” or “analysis” has strong cultural components….it is a voice, a stance, a relationship with texts and authorities that is taught, both consciously and unconsciously, by family members, teachers, the media, even the history of one’s own country….It means…finding words that show exact relationships between ideas, as is required in a low-context culture…It means valuing separateness over harmony (Fox, 1994, p.125).

Even less often did we embrace the experiences of our international students and academic staff and consider how we might learn from them about alternative teaching and learning approaches (Trahar, 2006; Kim, 2009). Thankfully, this has now changed. The stated ethos of the School is the celebration of our rich diversity and is embedded in our Strategy for the Development of Learning, Teaching and Assessment, 2012 – 2016: The Strategy stresses the need to provide excellent and intellectually demanding learning and teaching relevant for the 21st century, for a talented and diverse student population. Our students are experienced learners and we want them to enjoy a rewarding and fulfilling experience and to benefit from a rich learning environment that supports their diverse learning needs. We recognise that students and staff from different backgrounds bring a range of previous learning experiences and we want to ensure that everyone is encouraged to articulate these differences so that they can inform the continuous development of our pedagogical approaches and our distinctive and collaborative endeavours are celebrated.

To summarise:

Globalization is the context of economic and academic trends that are part of the reality of the 21st century. Internationalization includes the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions – and even - individuals – to cope with the global academic environment...

Globalization may be unalterable but internationalisation involves many choices (Altbach & Knight, 2007, pp. 290-291).

And even individuals’ implies, once again, that ‘individuals’ have a lesser role in the changing nature of higher education, yet it is the individuals who constitute the values, cultures and traditions of higher education that are rarely articulated, made transparent and exposed to critical scrutiny (Turner & Robson, 2008, Trahar, 2011). It is these more neglected areas that are explored in Part Two, with the aim of inviting you to reflect on your own learning and teaching approaches – and what informs them – and also to propose some strategies for internationalising the curriculum in the ‘international’ or ‘global’ classroom.
‘INTERNATIONALISATION AT HOME’

Teichler (2008), focusing on the internationalisation of higher education in Europe, points to a recent shift of higher education to a new area — the ‘internationalisation at home’, highlighting that “efforts to internationalise higher education cannot opt anymore for stand-alone activities, but have to integrate border-crossing activities with some steps towards international convergence and with mainstream activities at home” (p.195). Internationalisation at Home (IaH) is a term coined by a group of Northern European academics to explain/communicate that, in spite of the substantive changes in higher education referred to earlier in this document, the majority of students, academics and other staff are not mobile, thus the development of the qualities and skills attributed to global citizenship and cultural capability will not be realised by travelling to other countries for study or work. IaH focuses our attention on constituting “academic learning that blends the concepts of self, strange, foreign and otherness” (Teekens, 2006, p.17, original emphasis) and is congruent with the perspectives of those such as Appadurai (2001), Haigh (2008; 2009), Sanderson (2007) and Trahar (2007) who foreground the importance and value of the personal awareness and reflexivity of academic staff in higher education, as I proposed earlier. Such personal awareness is especially important in our encounters with anyone who we may position as ‘different’ from ourselves and indeed, find ourselves differently positioned by. Harris & Peacock (2010, p.129), draw attention to the “majority of existing studies which assume homogeneity among the international student population, ignoring important differences in culture, faith and ethnicity, which in fact exist across the home/international divide”. Similarly, Haigh (2009, p. 272) suggests that “frequently the cultural gap between a local community and the international student population, ignoring important differences in culture, faith and ethnicity, which in fact exist across the home/international divide”. Similarly, Haigh (2009, p. 272) suggests that “frequently the cultural gap between a local community and the international student population, ignoring important differences in culture, faith and ethnicity, which in fact exist across the home/international divide”. Similarly, Haigh (2009, p. 272) suggests that “frequently the cultural gap between a local community and the international student population, ignoring important differences in culture, faith and ethnicity, which in fact exist across the home/international divide”.

A key point that I am striving to make, throughout the publication, is that in any discussion about internationalisation of higher education, we need to examine ourselves and our local populations, beliefs, values, so that we can be prepared to reach out to those who may be from other contexts or from our own — who may have different academic traditions and educational experiences. Turner & Robson (2008, p.68) suggest that an “overall positive climate” can be developed through assisting “established and new participants” to identify ways in which learning and teaching can be more effective in internationalised institutions. Unfortunately, though, as suggested earlier, much of the literature (e.g. Montgomery, 2010; Peacock & Harrison, 2008; Montgomery, 2010) indicates that students with diverse cultural backgrounds are reluctant to interact, both within the classroom and elsewhere on campus. The comment below made by a local student in our HEA project (2008) supports this perspective:

It’s not about rudeness or about people disliking each other, it’s just the natural groups that people tend to form with people from their own countries. Sometimes people prefer to speak in their native tongue as well, which I find quite a lot with the Chinese students. But yeah (I) don’t really see much of mixing with international students.

One of the most important reasons for a lack of student interaction (Hyland et al., 2008, Montgomery, 2010) including cultural cliques, language, cultural differences in socialising, and institutional and degree course barriers and, in Part Two, I propose some practical ways to overcome these perceived obstacles. On a more positive note, in my own research and practice, I have encountered some rather more encouraging views, as exemplified by the following local, UK, doctoral student:

… I think the key thing I’ve learnt has been to accept other people’s points of view… Because I think in the world we live in it is very important for us to learn to accept other people; other people’s point of view.

The group consisted of all sorts of ages and nationalities and I enjoyed being forced to look outwards, to engage with all sorts of people and to be challenged. This is amazing! I felt the local learner, I didn’t feel that put me above everybody else, if anything – less. So I decided that the effort had to come from me. (Trahar, 2011, pp.88-89).

FINALLY...SOME PERSONAL MUSINGS

Before we can recognise the ‘Other’, we have to know ourselves well (Stromquist, 2003, p. 93).

When I first began contributing to the University of Bristol Master of Education (MEd) programme in 1999, I had extensive experience as an adult educator and of working with people often defined as ‘non-traditional’ students. They were mature students, part-time students combining study with work and family responsibilities, and those with little post-compulsory education. The majority, however, were white and British, like me. I rarely encountered students who were ‘culturally different’ and who did not speak English as their first language. In my first encounter with ‘international students’, I had planned a session on rational-emotive behaviour therapy (REBT); an approach to counselling developed by Albert Ellis a white, male North American. My discomfort in that first encounter is articulated more fully in Part Two, but in hindsight, I feared that I was being “pseudo-etic” (Biggs, 2001, p. 293). I was very uncomfortable with the issues of colonisation and of educational imperialism implicit in the “transfer of skills and knowledge from the university sector to the broader community” when “this broader community is in Asia, Africa or the Middle East” (Cadman, 2000, p. 476). My discomfort is redolent of Crossley’s (1984, 2000) identification of the potential problems that can occur from the uncritical transfer of educational theories, policies and innovations across international boundaries. In addition, I was concerned that ‘internationalisation’ was a “cover for creeping Westernisation” (Merrick, 2000, p.xii). Since then, I have continued to be provoked — and to provoke myself — to explore ways in which I might continue, unintentionally, to ‘transfer uncritically’ my own attitudes and practices of learning and teaching, grounded in particular philosophical and theoretical perspectives when working with people who have different traditions and values. By seeking to make transparent, not only the complexities, but also the rich potential in cross-cultural interactions, I am striving to recognise how my ethnicity and cultural affiliations serve as constructions of my identities as learner, as teacher, as human being, as they do those of the students.

Sanderson (2004, p.16) reconceptualises the meaning of becoming internationalised to be a “personal journey of deconstruction and reconstruction”. Such a personal journey may not resolve the imbalances of power in the world, but it might help level the playing field (Appadurai, 2001), even if only a little. It may also help:

To show the extent and manner in which globalising processes are mediated on the ground, in the flesh and ‘inside the head’... paying attention to diverse peoples and places, and their complex and contradictory experiences of, reactions to, and engagements with various aspects of globalisation as these intersect with their lives and identities (Kenway & Fahey, 2006, p.267).

In Part Two, we step into the landscape that I have sketched out in Part One, to investigate how ‘globalising processes are mediated on the ground, in the flesh and in the head’ by focusing on internationalisation of the curriculum and some practical ways to achieve it.
INTERNATIONALISATION OF THE CURRICULUM: CONCEPTS AND WORKING PRACTICES

Internationalisation of the curriculum, or curriculum internationalisation – as I indicated in the Introduction – is a term that, in my experience, very few people can define clearly. Hans de Wit argues that the internationalisation of higher education needs to be “brought back to where it belongs – in academia” (cited Leask, 2013, p.99). I agree wholeheartedly with this sentiment yet, as Leask herself comments, “disciplinary perspectives that incorporate the voices of academic staff as active participants in the process are relatively rare” (ibid). Maringe (2010, p.27) claims that curriculum internationalisation is not a top priority for many institutions of higher education because of academic resistance to “changing the purpose, content and methodology of teaching” and, as highlighted in Part One, there continues to be a gap between the institutional rhetoric of internationalisation and academic practice (Trahar, 2011, Green & Whitsed, 2013). Academics, however, are the core players in learning, teaching and assessment processes and therefore need to be proactive; the initiators of curriculum internationalisation. If we do not initiate it, we risk it being imposed by those who may be less appropriate to effect it.

Maringe & Woodfield, (2013) have developed a useful table “Mapping of Rationales of Internationalisation”. As the “pedagogical rationale” for internationalisation, they highlight “content, teaching principles and approaches, assessment, support for learning and the student experience” (p.15). In identifying “key strategies” they suggest “development of guidelines for preparing international curricula. Workshops for enhancing the pedagogical preparedness of staff to deal with aspects of international curricula” adding “there is a varied and highly limited view of the curriculum in different universities which constrains their understanding and application of pedagogical principles”. Leask & Bridge (2013, p.81) in their research into internationalisation of the curriculum across several disciplines in Australia, used Leask’s own definition of “the incorporation of an international and intercultural dimension into the content of the curriculum as well as the teaching and learning arrangements and support services of a program of study” as a framework for their study. Another definition that I like is:

INTERNATIONALISING THE CURRICULUM: DISCIPLINARY DIFFERENCES?

In 2011, the Australian Learning and Teaching council (ALTC) funded a study entitled “IoC in Action”. The key question in this study was “How can we internationalise the curriculum in this discipline area, in this particular institutional context, and ensure that, as a result, we improve the learning outcomes of all students” (Green & Whitsed, 2013, p.53)? This is an important question to ask, as disciplines vary in their conceptualisation of knowledge and learning, teaching and assessment approaches. Research (e.g. Clifford, 2009, Leask & Bridge, 2013) tends to indicate that those academics in the ‘soft’ disciplines of the humanities and social sciences are better disposed towards looking beyond content in internationalisation of the curriculum discussions, to reflect on learning and teaching processes.

Those in the ‘hard pure’ disciplines consider that their knowledge is already ‘international’ and can be more reluctant to consider their learning and teaching approaches and how they may be culturally mediated. The studies cited earlier highlight that much can be gained from interdisciplinary conversations as they can engender learning from each other and emphasise that, although “students need to grasp the concept of theoretical science…they will need some understanding of global issues and the better ways of making ethical judgements about their work” (Clifford, 2009, p.142).

INTERNATIONALISING THE ‘CONTENT’ OF THE CURRICULUM

A straightforward way to ‘internationalise’ curriculum content is to draw on research conducted in different countries. This is not always as simple as it appears, however, because the research capacity in many contexts is not sufficiently well developed to effect it. In addition, there is the added complication that academic journals are dominated by the US and the UK, in particular the US, and are published in English. I consider this situation to be iniquitous – but more important than my indignation is the dilemma that it creates. One example is the University of Bristol’s transnational programmes in Hong Kong. We include as much locally produced research as possible in our teaching, but, because none of the people who teach on our Hong Kong programmes speak Chinese, our ability to use local research published in English is impossible to locate research published in English from every context. The students, however, especially if they are postgraduates, are a rich resource and can locate research from their local contexts published in their languages. In doing so, they feel that their experiences and contexts are appreciated and valued by others, another step in encouraging everyone to engage actively with other cultures and with their knowledges.

DIVERSITY

Virtually everyone could in some fashion claim to be working across some kind of identity difference (Acker, 2011, p.416).

Do we place too much emphasis on diversity? After all, we are all different from each other – that is what makes us human. But I agree with Manathunga (2007, p.95) who proposes that a "liberal disavowal of difference" (emphasis in original) can lead to important identity issues being ignored. In any discussion of internationalisation of higher education and of the curriculum, it is usually the differences between people and cultures that concentrate our attention. The struggle can be whether to articulate the differences and use them to effect change that will benefit everyone - or to ignore them – thus engaging in the ‘liberal disavowal’ that Manathunga advises against. The environments that I work in are completely ‘diverse’. Students and academics identify as male, female, transgender, lesbian, homosexual, Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, of no faith, Chinese, Pakistani, having a disability – which may be visible or invisible – all or none of these identities. I could continue endlessly. I find this heterogeneity to be very rich indeed but I would be being disingenuous if I did not also add that I find it complex – and challenging.

Forrest, Judi & Davison (2012) comment, “it is always easier to observe the framework within which someone else’s thoughts, feelings and behaviours are embedded, rather than to see, much less challenge one’s own” (p.1). “Unhomelessness” is a postcolonial term that defines the discomfort that we can experience/feel when we encounter people whose values, beliefs, traditions are very different from our own. Rather than resist that discomfort, the exhortation is to encourage dialogue so that we can learn, not only why others hold the views that they do, but also why we hold them ourselves. I recall several situations where, considering myself sensitive to diversity, I have encountered beliefs and values that I find very difficult to accept or that I cannot accept at all. In each case, initiating dialogue has enabled me to understand why the person holds those beliefs and also why they are so alien to me. At the end of these conversations, neither of us may have changed our beliefs but our understanding of why we hold them has become clearer (Trahar, 2013).
What is learning? Are there different types of learning? Does learning depend on what is being learned? What makes good learning happen? To what extent is the way you teach informed by your understanding of how people learn? Or, do you teach in the way that you were taught? In this section, I discuss some learning perspectives and show how they continue to be dominated by ‘Western’ ideas. I include some ‘other’ perspectives on learning – and teaching – that I have distilled from my own research and practice over several years.

There are three broad, commonly used perspectives on learning, often referred to as the:
- reception model;
- constructivist model;
- co-constructivist model.

The reception model reflects behaviourism and is premised on knowledge being a fixed set of ideas or skills that can be transmitted from an educator to a learner. The educator gives the learner knowledge and s/he absorbs it. When learners are not able to ‘absorb’ the knowledge, they are positioned as problematic.

Behaviourism permeates higher education discourse in the form of aims, objectives, learning outcomes. Teaching is considered to be successful when the outcomes match the aims and objectives that have been established.

The constructivist model is related to the theories of those such as Jean Piaget. Learners have an active role in learning and, rather than absorbing knowledge from outside, they construct knowledge based on their experiences. These experiences might include doing activities, talking with other people or thinking. The educator’s role is to facilitate learning by providing the learner with suitable activities from which they can construct knowledge. The learner, however, is still seen in isolation.

The co-constructivist or social constructionist model is an extension of the constructivist model and reflects the sociocultural concepts of Vygotsky (1978) and Lave and Wenger (1991). The learner is positioned as an active participant but, from this perspective, learning develops through participation in activities with other people - and is social. Rather than acquiring knowledge, meaning-making happens through collaboration and dialogue with others. The educator is an expert learner, who participates in the learning and dialogue, contributing her/his greater experience to the collaboration.

In addition, the cultural critical discourse perspective takes the view that learning can only be understood within a broader cultural context; certain knowledge are privileged and therefore connected to power. The role of the educator is to facilitate learner transformation – ‘critical pedagogy’ – informed by the work of Freire (1972) and Giroux (1992).

**PERSPECTIVES ON LEARNING: LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Tennant et al. (2010) draw on Skelton’s (2005) four discourses that he proposes inform the everyday teaching practices in higher education. These are the traditional liberal, the psychologised, performative understanding and critical understanding. Everyone in higher education will be familiar with the traditional liberal perspective as it focuses on “disciplined study, engagement in rational argument… and the acquisition of universal and timeless knowledge” (Tennant et al, 2010, p.15). The students’ mastery of the discipline is important and ‘knowledge’ is usually communicated via lectures. Disciplinary authority is vested in the academic and the needs, interests, motivations and capabilities of the learner are assumed. Psychologised perspectives assume that learners have qualities – personality, intelligence, learning preferences and learning behaviours – which are presented as stable characteristics rather than being mediated by social, cultural and historical contexts. Performative understanding emphasises the ‘performance’ of the teacher, which is subject to scrutiny, for example, through students’ evaluation of teaching, quality audits, employment outcomes, and student retention. Critical understanding recognises disciplinary cultures, curriculum and teaching practices as excluding certain groups that are not part of the mainstream, for example, ethnic minorities, students that are disadvantaged economically or who have a disability.

“When shapes the culture of learning and intellectual HE spaces”? (Turner & Robson, 2008, p.11). If teachers are significant in ‘mediating knowledge and behaviours’ (ibid, p.83) then problematising not only pedagogical practices but the philosophical concepts that inform them is crucial in internationalising the curriculum (Trahatt, 2011). Learning, teaching and assessment are practices that, like any other, are constructed and mediated by cultural norms and academic traditions. The positioning of the learner as autonomous pervades higher education discourse in many ‘Western’ contexts – a perspective grounded in philosophies that privilege individual development.

In the traditional university disciplines, the ways of thinking are derived, historically, from the underlying philosophy of the Western world, involving causal explanations and critical reasoning, which can then be alien to students coming from very different cultural backgrounds…there needs to be a greater awareness of the ways in which thinking and acting are found in other cultures and the implications these have for university teaching (Entwistle, 2009, p.23).

Interrogating our own beliefs and values can help us to understand “the impact of our positioning as teachers and learners with different linguistic, cultural, disciplinary and experiential knowledge” (Ryan & Viete, 2009, p.305).

As I have indicated, I work with students from all over the world and, therefore, have attempted to research how learning and teaching are conceptualised in many different contexts. In the Confucian heritage cultures (CHC) of China, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan, for example, contrary to stereotypes of ‘the Chinese learner’ as being passive and reluctant to participate in discussion (Turner & Acker, 2002), I have discovered that questioning and discussion are encouraged but after the learner has focused on understanding and acquiring concepts (Peatt, Kelly & Wong, 1999, Watkins, 2000). Thus, a dominant belief that learning does not occur through discussion but by discussion following acquisition of ‘knowledge’ may explain apparent reluctance to contribute to group discussions and to challenge the opinions of others. Silence, rather than communicating a lack of engagement in the process of learning - which is how I perceived it - is an active process used to reflect more deeply, in contrast to behaviour that may be seen as confrontational in the encouragement to be ‘critical’.

**THE ‘CLASSROOM’**

In this section I focus on the classroom, as a physical space for learning and teaching – and on what happens there. Later I discuss virtual learning environments and e-learning but, here, I want to focus on the ‘traditional classroom’. Take a few moments to think about the rooms in which you teach:
- How is the furniture arranged? Is it fixed? Or can it be moved?
- Do the rooms have natural light?
- What are the information technology (IT) facilities like? Are there power points for students’ laptops/iPads? Are there interactive whiteboards? Flipcharts? Do you use these teaching tools?
- How do students with disabilities negotiate the space?
- Where do the students sit? Where do you sit – or stand? Do you move around – or do you stay in one place?

I have taught in a variety of spaces. My preference, undoubtedly, is for rooms with moveable furniture, preferably without tables so that students can be seated in a semicircle. Why do I consider this to be important? I believe that in order to communicate, we need to be able to see each other. If students are seated in rows, the only face that they can see is mine – if I am standing or sitting at the front. If/when they make a comment, they are making it to the back of another person’s head, thus the only reaction they can see is mine. I, undoubtedly, hold the power in the room – by being situated at the front.

In Hong Kong, I teach in rooms that have no natural light. The rooms are equipped with state of the art facilities but these are located at the front of the room. The furniture is fixed – although arranged in a horseshoe shape – with two rows of connected tables and chairs. The chairs are very comfortable but this layout means that, when the students are working in groups, they have to climb over the tables or work with the people closest to them, which is not always conducive to getting to know others. In addition, without careful ‘choreography’ it can result in all of the Hong Kong local students sitting on one side of the room and all of the non–locals – usually from the UK, Australia, Canada and first language English speakers – on the other.

Why am I paying so much attention to the physical environment in a publication that focuses on ‘internationalisation of the curriculum’? Learning environments are designed by people. Whether they are designed by people who are familiar with learning and teaching perspectives and principles is debatable, therefore it is useful to reflect on this dimension. Earlier, I discussed perspectives on learning and teaching. What
Some days later I bumped into a colleague in the street and shared with him my consternation. By this time, having reflected more deeply on my experience that evening, I had begun to question the ethical issues inherent in teaching a theoretical approach developed in one context and at a particular time in history to people from very different contexts. In addition, partly because I am British and many people in that class were from former British colonies, I was also musing on whether I was engaging in a form of colonialism. His reply startled me, “I don’t know what you’re worrying about. We treat our international students very well here”. This response, albeit well intentioned, communicated to me that a) he positioned ‘international students’ as a homogenous group and b) an imperialist undercurrent, which subsequently I found to be prevalent in much of the published research at the time.

INTERNATIONALISING THE CURRICULUM: A STORY FROM HONG KONG

I teach a course entitled Contemporary Perspectives on Learning on our Master of Education (MEd) in Hong Kong. The overall aim of this course, as the title suggests, is to introduce students to sociocultural perspectives on learning through the work of those such as Vygotsky (1978) and to emphasise learning as a social activity, exemplified, for example, through the work of Lave and Wenger (1991). The personal tensions that I experience between presenting students with ‘Western’ ideas and wanting to eschew ethnocentrism in my teaching, have led me to include material on perspectives on learning in Confucian heritage cultures. Many of the students, however, described themselves as people who have developed in their own context and mediated by values and beliefs that they tell me, consistently, are “typically Chinese.” Why is this? Is it related to the perceived dominance of ideas developed in and informed by ‘Western’ contexts? Is it related to Hong Kong’s history as a colony in which Chinese traditions were seen to be inferior? Or could it be because – and this is much more uncomfortable for me – they are reluctant, still, to challenge, question, critique, the Eurocentric concepts that continue to dominate education? I strive to ensure that a space is created for articulation of these complexities, but to what extent is that a reinforcement of a neocolonialist perspective? By encouraging such debate am I pursuing my own agenda and not respecting those students who have no desire to engage in such critical reflection?

LANGUAGE COMPLEXITIES

Hofstede, (1986), proposes that the chances of “successful cultural adaptation” are increased “if the teacher is to teach in the students’ language rather than if the student is to learn in the teacher’s language, because the teacher has more power over the learning situation than any single student” (p.314, emphasis in the original). I dispute the sentiment conveyed in the latter phrase but, undoubtedly, if I am operating in my first language and the majority of students are not, then the power imbalance cannot be denied. The politics of language are complex and beyond the scope of this publication but teaching in English is undeniably a dimension of internationalisation of higher education. Teaching in a language that is not the first language of many of the students – and of the academic staff in many contexts - is multilayered in its complexity.

In Mainland Europe, in particular in Scandinavia but also in France, Germany and the Netherlands, much higher education teaching is in English. In these countries, English is widely spoken but, nonetheless, teaching in English restricts many academics. Petra de Vries, writing in the Times Higher Education (08/09/11), about her experiences in international higher education in the Netherlands expresses this poignantly:

What about our beautiful Dutch language? Was it really sensible to force unhappy Dutch lecturers who spoke English badly to discuss difficult subject matter with equally unhappy Dutch students?

Most of those defined as ‘international students’ in Hong Kong are from Mainland China. In that context, many of the complexities of the international classroom and internationalising the curriculum relate to language and Hong Kong as a postcolonial context. The first language of Hong Kong is Cantonese – the first language of people from Mainland China is Mandarin; unless they come from the South of China, the Mainlanders do not speak Cantonese. In order to attract Mainlanders and other ‘international’ students, the teaching language in Hong Kong is English. Many local students do not speak very fluent English and are often resentful of the Mainlanders because their English is better. In addition, of course, the majority of academics are teaching in a language that is not their own. In Hong Kong, what often happens is that the lecturer begins by speaking in English but will then switch to Cantonese, thus alienating the international students – including those from Mainland China. In Malaysia, a country that is also establishing itself as an education hub, teaching is in English to attract international students, who are usually from Iran, Indonesia and Africa. Fewer of the local students, certainly at undergraduate level, speak English fluently and many of the academic staff do not speak it sufficiently fluently to be able to teach in it. Similar to Hong Kong, the lecturer switches to Bahasa Malaysia, the local language, excluding immediately the international students.

The moral of the stories told above is that appropriate support must be given to students, and in many cases, to academics, if the language of learning and teaching is not the first language of the context.

A PERSONAL STORY

In Part One, I recalled my first experience (1999) of what I would define as an ‘international’ classroom. This was profound for me and set me travelling on many journeys, including my PhD, which focused on the ways in which postgraduates in our Graduate School of Education experienced our learning and teaching ‘cultures’. The ‘discomfort’ that I mentioned in Part One was caused by walking into a room and being in the minority, minority in so far as ethnicity and first language were concerned. My experiences on that cold, winter evening are recounted elsewhere (e.g. Trahar, 2011) but, suffice to say, that I walked out of that room after the class had ended, deep in thought and considerably troubled. The questions on which I was pondering were:

- What relevance do the theoretical concepts that I have been charged with introducing to the students have for them? These are concepts developed by a white North American male
- What motivates people to come to the UK to study a subject – counselling – for which there is not a word in their own language?
TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED LEARNING/E-LEARNING

Just as books did not get rid of teachers, e-learning is very unlikely to do so. In fact, there is a call for more human interaction in teaching and learning that could probably be achieved by technology (Njenga & Fourie, 2010, p.209).

In this section, I offer a brief overview of how technology enhanced learning – e-learning – can be valuable in the process of internationalising the curriculum. I also explore some ‘myths’ about the use of technology in learning in higher education.

A definition of internationalisation of the curriculum that I cited at the beginning of Part Two was:

Curricula, pedagogies and assessments that foster: understanding of global perspectives and how these intersect and interact with the local and the personal; inter-cultural capabilities in terms of actively engaging with other cultures; and responsible citizenship in terms of addressing different value systems and subsequent actions (Clifford, 2009, p.135)

In reflecting on the place of e-learning in internationalising the curriculum, we need to consider, therefore, how it fosters understanding of global perspectives, how it enables us to engage actively with other cultures as well as to reflect on how it can enhance our teaching and, by implication, student learning. Tait & Gaskell, (2011, p.11) reflect that “e-learning has the potential to support the development of communities and promote social justice” but, at the same time, they propose that there is a question “as to whether [Open, Distance and e-learning] contributes to, or detracts from social justice in its facility for supporting the development of education on an international basis” (p.7). As they continue to say, “social justice can, however, be served by ensuring access for diverse groups of students” provided that “issues of programme relevance and cultural dilution” in cross-border education are addressed. (p.10).

Coursera, one of the largest providers of Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) indicates on its website https://www.coursera.org/about that:

We believe in connecting people to a great education so that anyone around the world can learn without limits.

Coursera is an education company that partners with the top universities and organizations in the world to offer courses online for anyone to take, for free. Our technology enables our partners to teach millions of students rather than hundreds.

We envision a future where everyone has access to a world-class education that has so far been available to a select few. We aim to empower people with education that will improve their lives, the lives of their families, and the communities they live in.

In examining this ‘vision’ in the light of what I have identified as key elements in internationalising the curriculum, MOOCs, according to Coursera, may be able to play a significant role in that process. MOOCs, for example, engage people from different cultures and on a global scale. Do they, however, develop intra-cultural capabilities and responsible citizenship? MOOCs are claimed as a “tool for democratising higher education”, “free, creditless and massive” but two criticisms are that “providing feedback is tricky” and “people want to be acknowledged for the amount of effort they’re putting in” www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQqVnoQH_YM A further criticism is that MOOCs perpetuate a transmission model of learning (Vardi, 2012) but a recent study (2013) by Glance, Forsey & Riley www.moocfeeds.com/the-pedagogical-foundations-of-massive-open-online-courses-david-g-glance-martin-forsey-miles-riley-first-mondavi claims that they are “based on sound pedagogical foundations that are at the very least comparable with courses offered by universities in face-to-face mode”.

Njenga & Fourie (2010, p.202) pose a crucial question “Is e-learning being adopted to improve teaching and learning or because it is a ‘virtual fashion’ with promising progress in the marketplace?” An advantage of e-learning technology enhanced learning is considered to be that it transfers the responsibility for learning onto the learner. The learner takes control of her/his own learning process by, for example, being able to choose when s/he accesses material online, when – or whether – s/he engages in discussion groups. Research indicates, however, that “there is an enormous need for human interaction, and there is a limit to the number of students an expert teacher can support online at any given time” (ibid, p.203).

I reflected on the ways in which we use e-learning in our Master of Education (EdM) and Doctor of Education (EdD) programmes in Hong Kong. These are transnational programmes where the students study for a University of Bristol degree in Hong Kong and Bristol academics travel there to teach. The programmes are supported by the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Blackboard – as are our programmes delivered in Bristol – and academic support is provided via email and Skype. All of the learning materials for the courses are uploaded to Blackboard, students submit their assignments and they are returned, via the VLE. Personally, I do not find Blackboard to be very attractive, visually, but I am also aware that I do not exploit its facilities to the full by, for example, making use of the discussion forums. When we began to use Blackboard some 10 years ago, I recall that we tried to initiate the use of these, unsuccessfully. Now of course the students often set up their own Facebook groups and can eschew Blackboard for online discussions.

Finally, the words below encapsulate technology enhanced learning/e-learning as a resource, rather than a universal panacea in international higher education:

What is therefore needed for the successful and effective transmission and creation of knowledge using e-learning, is a ‘common understanding’ of the nature of knowledge and learning across HEIs, and a transformation of the teaching fraternity into ‘reflective practitioners’ (Njenga & Fourie, 2010, p.209).
FACILITATING INTERCULTURAL GROUPWORK

In this section I address such questions as:

• What are the advantages and disadvantages of group work in a multicultural environment?

• What is a small group? What is a large group? How can a large group be divided into smaller groups?

• What are some useful strategies/activities for small groups that enable students to get to know each other and foster a sense of global citizenship?

As I have established, I believe that, as an academic, I am a core player in the processes of multiculturalization and internationalisation of the curriculum in my own organisation. I consider, therefore, that I am responsible for effecting intercultural communication in the classroom. In my view, this involves gaining an understanding of the different ways in which learning, teaching and assessment are culturally mediated (as discussed earlier) to ensure that my teaching is ethnorelative, rather than ethnocentric. It also means that I recognise that communication between people who perceive themselves to be different from each other does not happen by osmosis – it has to be initiated. At the beginning of any learning group, I have the responsibility to do that. All group dynamic theories emphasise the importance of the first few moments of a group – any group in establishing the climate. What I do in those first few moments is crucial. The students will take their cue from me. If I am sarcastic and unwelcoming, that will set the tone for the group. On the other hand, if I am friendly, it will be very different. In those early moments, until they become more confident, students see me as a role model; therefore, I consider it crucial to model ‘inclusive’ behaviour. If I exclude people, so will they. If I use jargon, so will they.

The advantage of this activity is that learners are working on problems/questions that they have generated – not those that I have generated. It is important to facilitate it carefully and, depending on the nature of the problem, to provide a series of ‘answers’, but this is an excellent peer learning activity.


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