

# Difference, globalisation and the internationalisation of curriculum

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The idea of internationalisation of curriculum has become entrenched in Australian higher education. Almost every university in Australia now professes to the need to transform its curriculum to reflect the goals of internationalisation. According to a national study conducted in 1995, 37 out of 38 Australian universities included a policy of internationalisation in their corporate plans. Furthermore, it was found that over 70 per cent of universities had strategies for the internationalisation of form and content of their curricula. (IDP 1996) The problem with these findings is that they do not tell us how the idea of internationalisation is understood. Even a cursory glance at policy documents suggests a diversity of meanings. In 1995, Australian universities claimed over 1000 different internationalised curriculum development initiatives. (IDP 1996) This number is most likely to have increased in the past four years, as universities experiment with new initiatives and plans in response to a changing educational environment.

An international comparative study conducted by the OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) defined international curricula as "an international orientation in content, aimed at preparing students for performing (professionally/socially) in an international and multicultural context, and designed for domestic students as well as foreign students." (OECD 1994, p. 9) Current mainstream understandings of internationalisation of curriculum in Australian universities are broadly in line with this definition, though most people in Australian higher education continue to view internationalisation as curriculum designed to broaden the vocational and life options students are provided. Thus, attempts to meet the specific needs of international students; to promote student exchange; to develop learning packages that are appropriate for delivery in overseas locations and lead to the recognition of learning by international organisations, or perhaps to joint or double degrees, are just some of the popular examples of internationalised curriculum. For some others, internationalisation can also mean efforts to study the history and culture of another country or a region.

While these views have become mainstream, new, and perhaps more expansive, ways of conceptualising the idea of internationalisation of curriculum are also emerg-

ing in Australian higher education. Many of these focus on values of globalism and intercultural understanding as fundamental to the management of the student diversity that has now become a conspicuous feature of Australian universities. There is a growing recognition that Australian universities need to develop new literacies and learning spaces that are relevant to the emerging challenges of globalisation. As universities increasingly adapt to competitive corporate environments in which cost-effectiveness is an integral aspect of on-going development, they have realised that a careful re-examination of the goals of curriculum development is required if higher education is to prepare students, teachers and citizens for the global environments of the approaching millennium.

At the twilight of the twentieth century, there is little doubt that emergent social, economic and cultural conditions have enabled tremendous growth in processes and possibilities of international education. At the intersection of globalisation of financial markets, innovation in transport and information and communication technology (ICT), as well as postcolonial shifts in the formation of cultural identities, and changes to the everyday concerns of universities throughout the industrialised world, the impact of internationalisation on learning, teaching and educational administration is as extensive as it is complex. As education systems adjust to the economic and cultural climate of the late 1990s, widespread interest in internationalisation has inevitably turned towards its relationship to the design and implementation of curriculum. The need to develop more thorough understandings and strategies for the internationalisation of curriculum has steadily grown alongside growth in student mobility (actual and virtual), developments in flexible delivery and institutional restructuring in response to 'new knowledge markets' and cultural diversification.

The issue of cultural diversification of Australian higher education lies at the heart of the goals of internationalised curriculum. It should be noted, however, that the Australian higher education system has always been diverse to a considerable extent, as a reflection of the unique demographic composition of Australia. This

diversity was often unacknowledged and treated as something that was irrelevant to curriculum design. As a result, Australian curriculum remained largely Eurocentric, reflecting European cultural production, represented in the Arnoldian terms as “the best that has been said and thought in the world”. (Arnold 1937) It was assumed that the idea of the university embodied an unwavering and singular standard of universal truth. This monoculturalism both reflected and simultaneously reproduced the assimilationalist policies of governments until the mid 1970s. Even in the 1980s, efforts to introduce multicultural perspectives in Australian higher education were at best minimal, and more often than not met with either suspicion or derision.

Over the past decade, however, there has been a discernible shift in attitudes towards cultural diversity, not only in Australian universities but elsewhere as well. Histories and cultural traditions that were once silenced are now being acknowledged. Burbules (1997) has argued that this shift is in part a reflection of the theoretical debates within the humanities where there is “a postmodern suspicion of ‘metanarratives’ and of unifying discourses generally”. The effectiveness of committed and active social movements alongside the tremendous force of global change has produced a political framework in which groups can argue for their cultural distinctiveness against previously accepted conceptions of uniformity and consensus. A more comprehensive awareness of difference and its implications for personal and social development has come to be seen as a profound feature of contemporary life. Changes within the nation-states as a result of this shift, moreover, are more closely aligned with the general processes of cultural globalisation. Notions of ‘world society’, ‘globalisation’ and ‘global culture’ have gained widespread currency throughout academic discourse, and to a lesser extent, popular culture in general. (Connell 1996) Considerations of cultural difference are no longer confined to discourse of interethnic relations, managed by national governments, but now span the global terrain.

Associated with a shift in the political organisation of nation-states towards a new system of modalities, globalisation is connected to the social economic and political transformation of the twentieth century, during which time “the world transformed ever more into ‘a single place’” (Waters 1995, p. 39) The word ‘global’ suggests a totality, something that enfolds a comprehensive group of objects and beings in a way that involves the whole world. Processes of globalisation integrate the world into one extensive system. (Waters 1995, p. 3) Recent developments in ICT, for example, involve new flows of information and cultural representations that defy traditional boundaries. (Appadurai 1996) The present surge of globalisation features a major shift towards

international economic integration of product and capital markets.

However, as many theorists have pointed out, globalisation is both a differentiating as well as a homogenising force. According to Hall (1996), globalisation pluralises the world by recognising the values of cultural niches and local traditions. Furthermore, different societies appropriate the materials of globalisation differently. The global shift is thus accompanied by a language that highlights the cultural aspects of economic relations, and the need to develop products that are responsive to local needs, values and traditions.

Australian higher education has not been slow to recognise this insight. In a policy statement in 1992, the then Minister of Education, Kim Beazley (1992, p. 5) acknowledged that Australia’s approach to internationalisation of education was “too narrowly commercial with insufficient recognition of student needs and of the benefits of international education”, and that therefore a new policy discourse that emphasised educational values and quality, a geographical focus on the Asia Pacific region, and a broadening of Australia’s international education activity to include research exchanges and links and staff exchanges, was needed. With its recognition of the mutual benefits from internationalised education and training, the Government noted that:

*...international education is an increasingly important part of Australia’s international relations. It uniquely spans the cultural, economic and interpersonal dimensions of international relations. It assists cultural understanding for all parties involved. It enriches Australia’s education and training systems and the wider Australian society by encouraging a more international outlook.* (Beazley 1992, p. 1)

This orientation in turn enframes curriculum development, whereby strategies are encouraged “which respond to the diverse and sophisticated nature of the global environment”. (DEET Annual Report 1995, p. 28). Internationalised curriculum based on values of “innovation”, “flexibility” and “enterprise culture” is highlighted, as is the idea of the ‘client focus’, in which internationalised study is seen to foster an in-depth knowledge of conditions in that country, cultural understanding and sensitivity, and the capacity to deliver products and services that are responsive to the distinctive needs of the client.

Economic and cultural aspects of international education are thus intertwined. As Viggo Haarlov (1997) argues: “There is a growing incentive to have an international dimension included in higher education programs, partly because of labour market stipulations to this effect and partly because social developments in general are heading towards a multicultural and more globally minded society.” In a comprehensive overview of the field, Knight and de Witt (1995) maintain that

internationalisation is a meaningless term without a conscious effort to integrate an intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service of the institution." According to Cope and Kalantzis (1997), a key to internationalisation is the recognition and valuing of global diversity and the capacity to understand and respond to cultural differences, with a combination of local and global values, such as openness, tolerance and cosmopolitanism.

Most Australian universities now express this commitment to the values of cultural diversity. The University of Melbourne has, for example, developed a fairly extensive policy on cultural development. Monash University has identified engagement, innovation and internationalisation as its key values. The Queensland University of Technology has established an office to oversee the implementation of its commitment to cultural diversity. RMIT University views its goal of internationalising the curriculum in terms of two aspects: teaching and learning which "incorporates a global, international and multicultural orientation and the promotion of international and cross cultural understanding and empathy". Now while this commitment to values of diversity and tolerance is clearly welcome, exactly how it is understood and is translated into practice is less clear. Much of the activity seems to rest on a fairly limited understanding of the contemporary politics of difference. In what follows, we argue for a more complex view of these concepts and of curriculum, which is critically responsive to the processes of globalisation and of new economic and cultural conditions that now dominate both Australian universities and society more generally.

Part of the problem with the current rhetoric of intercultural and international education is its location within a discourse of economic necessity. It is felt that the commercial potential of international education may not be realised in a context that does not adequately recognise cultural difference. The fashionable language of 'productive diversity' (Cope and Kalantzis 1997) can easily be mistaken for its corporate rather than its ethical impulse. The language of recognition, like the liberal language of tolerance, is in a real sense a patronising language, which simply pays lip service to the celebration of cultural distinction. Such a celebration is often no more than an administrative instrument that serves to contain and restrain expressions of difference. When cultural difference is constructed simply as a resource, then the issues concerning the ways in which difference is historically constructed and plays an important role in defining social and administrative relationships within universities are effectively overlooked.

Difference is not something that is external to the university; a resource that students bring to university. Rather, it something that is constitutive of social relations within the university. It is constructed and enacted

through the practices of curriculum. To view difference as simply an external factor to be taken into account in the construction of curriculum is to treat it in an instrumental manner, to regard it as involving a cultural formation that is somehow external to what goes on within the university. It is to assume that student diversity is mainly relevant to issues of interpersonal relations, and not to the issues of academic content and pedagogies. But to do this is to fail to see how those institutions within which curriculum is constructed may themselves be culturally biased and exclusionary. What is required is a careful analysis of the political dynamics of cultural interactions that form the borders of curriculum planning within which difference acquires significance. Furthermore, universities can no longer assume a position of neutrality in the formation of curricular relations, as somehow being external to the more general processes of intercultural articulation.

What this argument implies is that the relationship between curriculum and cultural difference needs to be reconsidered in a more dynamic, relational way, rather than in purely instrumental terms. A better understanding is needed of the curricular and administrative mechanisms through which differences are identified, marked out, and integrated into teaching and learning. This includes an understanding of how difference works relationally through the structural operations of curriculum: in textbooks, in time allocation and in practices of assessment and in other administrative practices, which privilege some values and marginalise others. Our problem is not that, in a global university, students are different, but that we find it difficult to 'read' difference. As a result, some differences are sometimes overlooked when they should not be and, on other occasions, they are made to make more of a difference than they must. Here differences are politicised in antagonistic ways by defining and locating different kinds of people as exotic or even inimical in various realms of everyday life. In internationalising the curriculum, what is needed is a practical understanding of how difference can be both self-ascribed and constructed by others to deal with it; how students construct their identities and how it might be possible for curriculum to critically engage with their contingent and relational character.

Without such an understanding, it is not possible to appreciate the ways in which the politics of difference affect educational participation. For it needs to be recognised that the discourse structures of Australian universities are constructed to normalise and legitimate certain existing patterns of power relations. Favoured ways of representing, speaking and acting, as well as favoured conceptions of knowledge and skills, are the cultural capital of such educational discourse structures which govern and control student engagement with the curriculum. Indeed, the success of students often de-

depends on the extent to which they can orient themselves to the dominant group's educational discourse. Those who either do not understand or resist the dominant discourse become the failures of a system unsympathetic to difference. Some become excluded entirely.

Unless learning is made culturally relevant and better articulated to the complexities of the politics of difference in a world of student mobility across cultural and national boundaries, many students will remain confused and alienated. What is required is a complex multi-voiced approach to educational experiences, which does not assume fixed categories of cultural difference but encourages instead their exploration. What is needed is a set of administrative principles which enable everyone in a university to continually search for the relevant connections between different cultural starting points and different cultural frames and experiences. A university in which cultural dialogue is missing, and which insists on compliance to unreflexive bureaucratic rules, that is antipathetic to heterogeneity of student voices, is unlikely to develop a sophisticated view of internationalisation of its curriculum.

One of the ways in which it is possible to determine the manner in which Australian universities conceptualise the idea of internationalised curriculum is to look at their professional development programs, designed to enable staff to explore the issues of diversity and intercultural relations. Kate Patrick (1997) has described some of the approaches taken. These include: internationalisation as cross-cultural awareness; internationalisation as professional capacity to undertake tasks in different cultural environments and internationalisation as exploration of professional discourses. A critical examination of these approaches suggests that such approaches seldom question the normative cultural assumptions upon which the traditional practices of Australian higher education are based. For example, in an effort to enhance an understanding of cultural diversity, these approaches seek to describe the cultural values and practices of international students but do not ask how these values and practices are constructed, or what significance they have for students or how they are often transformed by the experiences of international education. These strategies are reduced to 'add-ons' to the dominant culture, which in turn is assumed to be self-evident, consensual and homogeneous.

The cultural identities that international students bring to Australian universities are never self-evident. They are already saturated by the experiences of colonial histories, local cultural diversity and political complexity, on the one hand, and by the contemporary homogenising experiences of 'global media spaces' (Morley & Robins 1995), on the other. The idea of internally homogeneous and authentic culture is an absurdity, as Appadurai (1996, p. 34) has argued, "natives... people confined to

and by the places to which they belong, groups unsullied by contact with the larger world, have probably never existed". International education itself is an expression of the forces of globalisation that are now reshaping people's identities, their social imagination, in which the notion of travelling overseas to receive one's education holds an important place.

Travelling overseas is of course a spatial metaphor about which a great deal has been written recently in both cultural geography and postcolonial theory. Metaphors of mobility, transculturation and diaspora have served to highlight "the possibilities of hybrid identities which are not essentialist but can still empower people and communities by producing in them new capacities for action. The ethnic absolutism of the 'root' metaphors', fixed in place is replaced by mobile 'route metaphors which can lay down a challenge to the fixed identities of 'cultural insiderism'" (Pile & Thrift 1995, p. 10). And as Hall (1991, p. 48) has argued, "the notion that identity...[can] be told as two histories, one over here, one over there, never having spoken to one another, never having anything to do with one another...is simply not tenable any more in an increasingly globalised world". This view implies a fundamentally different conception of internationalised curriculum, as founded on an ethic of difference which demands an openness of outlook, encouraging a freedom to move across borders and boundaries in an exploration of new senses of self and other.

In a sense, to view the celebration of diversity itself as an educational goal is to overlook the immense possibilities of an ethic of difference. The distinction between diversity and difference is significant here. Critical of the liberal idea of diversity, Homi Bhabha (1995) has pointed out that it masks an illusion of pluralistic harmony; positing a framework in which diversity is tolerated only so long as it does not challenge the dominant cultural norms and social order. To be attentive to difference, in contrast, is to understand difference as dynamic, as always a product of history, culture, power and ideology. Differences occur within and among groups, and should not be seen as absolute, binaristic or irreducible, but as always socially and culturally relational. If this is so, then internationalisation of curriculum must not assume the task of merely representing cultural diversity in the curriculum, but must involve the creation of new learning spaces in which the politics of difference in relation to histories of knowledge and power can be explored, in which the dominant values and other competing values can be interrogated and in which new patterns of identity formation, meaning and representation can be negotiated.

The idea of international curriculum in relation to the politics of difference challenges us to rethink the design, planning and delivery of higher education in new ways.

It implies the blurring of form and content. It suggests that current understandings of curriculum as simply a process of study of other cultures are insufficient in the international context. Internationalisation of curriculum involves a dynamic interplay between subject matter and its implementation across a variety of cultural milieus which is undecidable in advance. In a global context characterised by shifting and hybrid cultural identities and new technological modes of the transmission and reception of knowledge, the content of international curriculum involves an erosion of the categorical distinctions between course composition and operational aspects of study.

As Australia prepares for its first virtual university, new ways of thinking about curriculum need to be developed to meet the changing imperatives of the global environment alongside serious reconsideration of teacher-centred approaches to education. In negotiating the complexities of cultural difference and different perspectives of students, curriculum assumes a comparative orientation by default. (Mestenhauser 1997) In doing so, traditional disciplinary boundaries between disciplines become problematic as curriculum is compelled to change for the new demands of work and life in which exposure to alternative cultural perspectives is increasingly a part. Internationalisation destabilises conventional frameworks of curriculum design and implementation at local, national and international levels.

The simultaneous development of student-centred approaches and common approaches to curriculum planning at the macro-level mean that the loci of control over curriculum development and implementation exist in a state of flux. Growing conditions of competition and the unregulated nature of new media further contribute to this dynamic situation. It is for these reasons that a more organic approach to curriculum planning and implementation is necessary. Internationalisation of curriculum is more than just a response to emergent global conditions, it is a framework of values and practices oriented towards heightened awareness and appreciation of the politics of difference as the basis for developing the necessary skills and literacies for a changing world. International curriculum is therefore about an engagement with difference both within and beyond spaces of learning. An organic approach to internation-

alising curriculum implies a consistent but flexible strategy that is recognised and executed throughout interpersonal, institutional and regional settings. This would encourage the kind of culture that is relevant and appropriate to the new learning spaces currently in formation.

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