

Internationalising teaching and learning: perspectives and issues voiced by senior academics at one Australian university

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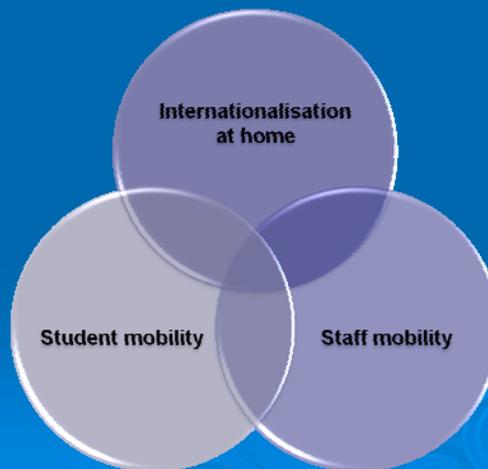
Overview

- This presentation draws on an institutional research study which investigates the gap between rhetoric & practice in internationalising the curriculum (IoC);
- From the perspectives of academics in key curriculum leadership positions at one Australian research-intensive university;
- It focuses on understandings of IoC and perceived challenges;
- Suggestions of addressing these challenges (with potential relevance to other tertiary institutions) are discussed.

Defining internationalisation of the curriculum (IoC)

- *IoC* refers to 'the process of developing curriculum which is internationally oriented, aimed at preparing students for performing (professionally, socially) in an international and multicultural context, and designed for domestic students as well as foreign students' (IDP Education Australia 1995).
- This widely accepted definition of IoC incorporates, at the very least, the values of a 'liberal' framework, with its emphasis on comparative, global perspectives and the ability to communicate across cultures (Hanson 2010).
- However, more recently, many have argued that IoC has a third goal: the ability to *act* responsibly in the face of global inequities (Clifford 2008; Hanson 2010).

Components of IoC



Internationalisation at home (IaH)

- Refers to 'any internationally related activity with the exception of outbound student mobility', which fosters a cosmopolitan campus where students and staff of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds communicate openly and respectfully (Nilsson 2003, p. 31).
- Typically involves international and local content, face-to-face intercultural activities at the local level, as well as international online communications (Jones & Brown 2007)
- While there is agreement on the need for balance between IaH and outbound mobility (Wächter 2003), this presentation focuses on the challenges and issues perceived by academics regarding IaH and suggestions of how these should be addressed.

Focus of research: academics in key curriculum leadership positions

- The focus of this presentation is on a 'neglected group' of (potential) curriculum leaders in the faculties and schools (departments) who can 'influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute' at the coalface of teaching and learning (Anderson & Johnson 2006, p.2-3).
- As Groennings argued, faculty academics are the 'gatekeepers' or 'harbingers' of curriculum change (cited in Green & Schoenberg 2006).

The case study

Context

- Study conducted in one large Australian research-intensive university;
- University-wide action research project instigated by the institution's Executive [in particular, an initiative of DVCs international (I) and academic (A)]; designed to
 - Provide a 'snapshot' of current perceptions & practices
 - Start a process of university-wide engagement
- The University has a highly devolved structure: consisting of a number loosely federated faculties (Anderson & Johnson 2006);
- The University has not defined IoC or developed institutional policies, strategies or targets;
- IoC implicitly supported by institutional documents such as Teaching and Learning Plan and Graduate Attribute Statement;
- Two of five University's attributes refer to global or intercultural dimensions.

The case study (continued)

Methodology

- Review of literature on internationalisation of the curriculum and related aspects;
- Data collection through semi-structured interviews;
- Interviews recorded, transcribed and analysed;
- Interviews analysed through an inductive and iterative approach focusing on emerging themes informed by literature.

The case study (continued)

Methodology (continued)

- Interviews conducted with 115 academics, namely:
- At the faculty level: Executive Deans; Associate Deans Academic (ADA) and Associate Deans Research (ADR); in one case Associate Dean International;
- At the research institutes: Directors;
- At the school level: Heads of Schools (HoS) and School Teaching and Learning Chairs.

Limitations

- The restricted range of the interviewees– unable to draw any substantial conclusions regarding differences within /between individual faculties & disciplines.
- ‘Snapshot’ view cannot account for changes as a result of engaging academics in the study.

Understandings of IoC

Our research revealed:

- Widespread confusion/uncertainty
- Variation between the understandings and practices at different levels of leadership

Faculty:

- Assoc Deans Academic (T&L) emerged as *de facto* leaders
- Assoc Deans Research & Directors Research Institutes did not feel they had much input into curriculum

Schools:

- Revealed marked variation - enthusiasm -> lack of interest -> cynicism.
- Science and disciplinary differences?

Understandings of the concept among proponents of IoC

- They held strong, personal views about concept & practice, which were
 - Consistent with literature
 - Similar across most faculties
- Believed IoC was essential and integral to teaching and learning.

Understandings of the concept among proponents of IoC

- *Inclusive* (e.g. Lawrence 2003)
- *Comparative and reflexive* (e.g. Sanderson 2008)
- *'Intentionally' diverse* (e.g. Jones & Brown 2007)
- *Global and local* (e.g. Shiel 2006)
- *Interdisciplinary* (e.g. Engberg & Green 2002)
- *Includes 'informal' curriculum* (e.g. Leask 2009)

Challenges concerning IoC

The most commonly perceived challenges concerned the need to:

- 1) define and 'concretise' internationalisation the curriculum (IoC)/internationalisation of teaching and learning (Wächter 2003), in a way that accounts for disciplinary differences;
- 2) clarify roles of responsibility for IoC;
- 3) address common misconceptions (such as that local/Australian issues have no place in an internationalised curriculum);
- 4) harness the cultural diversity of staff to enrich teaching;
- 5) address wider student welfare issues and creating a more cosmopolitan campus.

Addressing the challenges

- Addressing two key challenges (uncertainty about the *meaning of IoC* and *responsibility for IoC leadership*) underpinning other related challenges (mentioned above);
- Based on suggestions made by academics.

Meaning of IoC

- A clear definition of the concept applicable across the institution provided by the university (in a manner that allows for development and implementation within disciplines).
- Development of discipline-specific, programmatic approaches to IoC supported by the university (e.g. through access to the institution's learning and teaching grants for the purpose of curriculum innovation; collaboration with academic developers and others with expertise in IoC; dissemination of good practice within and across faculties; formal recognition and reward for good practice and innovation).

Addressing the challenges (continued)

Responsibility for IoC leadership

-established through:

- Clear role descriptions;
- Strong lines of communication between the senior management, the faculties, schools and institutes;
- Not overly hierarchical.

Common misconceptions (e.g. local/regional issues no place in an internationalised curriculum)

- By developing a deeper understanding of IoC among staff (e.g. through sharing case studies of good practice among schools and faculties and working closely with academic developers).

Addressing the challenges (continued)

Student welfare and creating a more cosmopolitan campus

- Requires a whole-institutional and sector-wide approach;
- Utilizing both formal, and informal ('hidden', 'latent') curriculum – an untapped site for meaningful interaction between international and domestic students (Leask 2009).

Harnessing cultural diversity of staff

- Requires a sensitive approach (close cooperation between academics and HR staff to prevent extensive workloads, potential for tokenism and exploitation);
- A greater promotion of offshore teaching and research collaborations, and sabbaticals.

For further discussion of these issues, refer to Green & Mertova (2009).

To sum:

- The study described in this presentation has revealed a wide range of understandings of IoC among senior academics (from enthusiasm and deep interest to a lack of interest and even cynicism);
- The academics have highlighted a number of challenges and proposed ways these could be addressed;
- Their suggestions of addressing these challenges point to a whole-institutional process based on a combination of a 'top-down' approach (definition of IoC and clear role description and communication processes) and 'from the middle out' (Rogers 1995; Caruana & Hanstock 2008) approach consisting of 'learning conversations' (Laurillard 1997) where 'the meaning of the innovation is constructed over time through a social process of human interaction' (Rogers 1995, p.399).

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