Transnational Education: Developing Leadership Capability

Module B – Component 1 narrative:

Jane had been given the task of setting up a twinning program arrangement with the Yungchung University of China. The Head of her faculty had been involved in a university delegation to a number of Chinese universities and had signed an MOU with several of them to deliver partnership courses. The arrangement was that students would complete two years at the Chinese university, including an intensive English language development program, and then move to the Australian campus for the final two years of the course. This pathway entry would mean that students would be given automatic entry to the second year of study on the Australian campus.

Jane made several visits to the Chinese campus to oversee the establishment of the arrangement and to try to satisfy herself that English language competence and disciplinary standards would be delivered and maintained. She found it very difficult to get from the university personnel the evidence she needed or answers to her probing questions about standards, and returned to Australia each time with misgivings about the likely preparedness of students. She expressed these concerns to the Head of Department, Michael, but was advised that the arrangement was financially important to the department and that they needed to “make it work.”

Jane decided to share her concerns with those teaching the final two years of the program but was determined not to present a pessimistic view but instead to try to prepare these academics to provide extra support to the new students. She read up on policy and was somewhat daunted by the undertaking, both from the regulations governing education of international students but also of her concern about the preparedness of academics in her department to teach international students.

She approached the convener of the local seminar series to get in a speaker on teaching international students, and in particular understanding Chinese learners. This was not received well by all of the academics who started to express doubts about the impending student intake. She then spoke to colleagues in a faculty with previous experience of programs and then to learning advisers and academic staff developers. She also read some of the scholarly literature. From this she determined that the staff still needed to come to better understandings of their role, and also that some resources would be needed to provide assistance for the students so that pressure would be taken off the academics to alleviate their anxieties and also to provide support to students if needed. With the support of the Head of Department, Michael, he organised a half-day seminar for the department on internationalising the curriculum. She also tried to make an arrangement with the student learning support unit to
provide additional assistance for students who may need it, but the unit could only provide central generic programs.

A few months before the new students arrived, Jane was seconded to another area of the University and Samuel, one of the academics teaching in the program, was asked to take over the role of managing the international students. Samuel had attended only one of the preparatory seminars that Jane had organised, and in addition, had a full teaching timetable and heavy research commitments and so had little time to devote to role. When the first cohort of 36 students arrived, Samuel was on leave so the only induction program that the students had was the one organised centrally by the university. Samuel had prepared some written advice for the relevant subject coordinators in the department about resources and workshops available to them in relation to teaching NESB students.

The 36 new students made a big impact on the average class size in core units which jumped from 45 to about 80. As feared, the students’ English was not as good as expected, which brought complaints from the teaching staff. One third of the Chinese students were found to have plagiarised in their first written assignment. Having come into the second year, they had missed a lot of the scholarly writing and assessment expectations which had been inculcated in first year students. The Chinese students did not integrate well with local students and some local students were unhappy having them in their collaborative groups because they did not contribute to the collective group work output. The student feedback ratings, published at the end of the year, were down, and it was the local students who were most critical. Teaching staff were then critical of the whole twinning arrangement. The Head of Department, Michael, again advised that they had to “make it work” especially as the next intake of students was expected to be 60. Michael subsequently relieved Samuel of his role and renegotiated to get Jane to return and take charge of the program.

Discussion:

* What responsibilities do Australian universities have with respect to providing ‘extra’ support for international students if they have already qualified for entry to the University?

* Using the ICVF identify leadership behaviours of Jane, Samuel and Michael.

* What leadership behaviour/s might Jane best adopt in taking over and ‘repairing’ the situation which had developed?