Internationalisation of higher education is the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into teaching, research and service of the institution (Back, Davis, & Olsen, 1996). Internationalisation is one of the objectives explicit in Curtin University’s mission statement. The goal is “the development of students and staff as citizens of the world, emphasising an international outlook, cultural diversity, and an informed respect for indigenous peoples.” The University’s commitment to this process is reflected in its strategic plans, the activities of the International Office and principles espoused within its Equal Opportunity and Social Justice charters. Thus, for Curtin, internationalising means the integration of an international dimension into teaching and learning, research and development and the policies and management of the university.

What does internationalising the curriculum mean?

Basically, an internationalised curriculum may be different in content (what is taught), form (delivery methods) or structure (organisation of the learning experiences and content of programs). Thus, internationalisation has an influence on teaching – what is taught, how it is taught and how it is assessed. As well, international perspectives will be an integral part of the teaching methodology, content, structure and organisation of units, and the thinking of both staff and students.

The scope of internationalisation of the curriculum also extends to:

- Recruitment and development of staff with the experience, education and commitment to implement internationalisation objectives;
- International movement and experience for staff and students;
- International movement of loci of teaching and learning activities; and
- Links with international education institutions and associated agencies.

The OECD (IDP Education Australia, 1995) outlines nine different types of internationalised curricula:

- Curricula that prepare graduates for defined international professions;
- Curricula leading to internationally recognised professional qualifications;
- Curricula leading to joint or double degrees that include international studies;
- Curricula with compulsory parts offered at universities abroad, staffed by local lecturers (incl. exchange & study abroad programs);
- Curricula with an international course or area/language studies;
- Interdisciplinary programs, such as region and area studies, covering more than one country;
• Curricula in which the traditional/original course area is broadened by international cross-cultural/intercultural approaches;

• Curricula in foreign languages or linguistics which explicitly addresses cross-cultural communication issues and which provide training in intercultural skills; and

• Curricula in which the content is especially designed for foreign students.

What is different about an internationalised curriculum?

There are many ways of conceptualising the dimensions of an internationalised curriculum. For example, a curriculum in which the “traditional/original course area is broadened by international cross-cultural/intercultural approaches” may have any or all of the following features (IDP Education Australia, 1995):

1. Teaching & learning:
   a) Focuses on learning outcomes;
   b) Is sensitive to context and culture;
   c) Is sensitive to the constraints of all learners;
   d) Recognises international students as a resource; and
   e) Accommodates students’ various learning styles and preferences.

2. Program content:
   a) Includes specific reference to contemporary international and local content;
   b) Does not promote monolithic descriptions of other countries or cultures;
   c) Addresses issues such as social justice, equity, human rights and related social and economic issues;
   d) Addresses critical global environmental issues;
   e) Includes topics on ethical issues in globalisation;
   f) Includes international case studies;
   g) Includes accounts of the historical background to current international practices;
   h) Includes investigation of professional practices in other cultures; and
   i) Includes an exploration of how knowledge may be constructed differently from culture to culture.

Global perspectives

Curriculum content should represent global perspectives. One view (Schoorman, 1997) is that teachers should ensure that their curricula incorporate a balanced representation of the globe, and not limit their international focus to a particular region. International perspectives should also be represented throughout the curriculum, and not just as occasional references. The presence of international topics in a syllabus is not guaranteed to generate international awareness or sensitivity among students.

Instruction should support the intent of the syllabus by drawing on the knowledge base of students. This is particularly important when international students are present, because too often they are ignored as a valuable educational resource. The inclusion of multiple international perspectives should not be limited to the presentation of alternate
viewpoints, but should involve critical examination of the multiple perspectives through engaged dialogue within the group.

The notion of belonging to a global learning community enables students to acquire critical awareness of how they construct their own understanding, and to identify their own (often ethnocentric) ways of thinking beyond the limits of their own culturally bound conceptual frameworks.

**Cultural inclusivity**

An internationalised curriculum is an ‘inclusive’ curriculum – one that values and includes multi-cultural perspectives. An inclusive curriculum aims to promote the development of a two-way flow of ideas and values between communities through:

- Value for the culture, background and experience of all students;
- Inclusivity of gender, culture and differences related to ethnicity, language and socio-economic background;
- Acknowledgement that any curriculum decision is a selection rather than a complete truth;
- Making explicit the rationale underpinning course design; and
- Responsiveness to the knowledge base of students.

(Gallini & Zhang, 1997)

McLoughlin (2001) argues that teaching principles, student tasks and assessment design for an online curriculum can be viewed from two perspectives – a traditional, didactic view and a ‘culturally responsive’ view. The same argument can be applied to face-to-face teaching or distance education courses. An internationalised curriculum should be culturally responsive.
Good teaching practice

Internationalising the curriculum is often as much about improving teaching and learning practices as it is about changing what is taught (Ramsden, 1992). Thus, in order to understand how we might begin the process of internationalisation, it is often necessary to challenge the way we think about teaching. Ramsden points out that the improvement of teaching is related to the extent to which academics are prepared to conceptualise teaching as a *process* of helping students to ‘change their understanding’ of the subject matter they are taught. In relation to internationalisation of the curriculum ‘good teaching practice’ can therefore be described as the implementation of a range of teaching processes designed to assist all students to learn about and understand the international context of their studies, and to operate effectively in international professional environments.

Assessment

Biggs [1999] reminds us that to be effective, assessment must be viewed as an integral part of learning. It must be explicitly linked to student learning outcomes and grounded in authentic (real world) experience rather than focussed on recall of abstract knowledge. Authentic assessment has several dimensions and leads to the kinds of skills and processes that underpin a global perspective, that is:

- The production of knowledge rather than reproduction of facts;
- The capacity to understand multiple perspectives; and
- The ability to integrate knowledge and synthesise it in new ways.

Students will define learning outcomes according to the types of assessment tasks they complete. Provided there is a match between assessment tasks, learning activities and learning outcomes (or objectives), students will learn what is intended. Unless learners are required to engage in real world tasks and solve complex real world issues, they will not develop the skills of intercultural competence and global thinking. Teachers of international students therefore need to make expectations clear, provide explicit guidance for students in completing assessment tasks, and ensure alignment with course outcomes.

Graduate attributes

According to the University of South Australia (Leask, 1999), graduates with a global/international perspective:

- Display an ability to think globally and consider issues from a variety of perspectives;
- Demonstrate an awareness of their own culture and its perspectives and other cultures and their perspectives;
- Appreciate the relation between their field of study locally and professional traditions elsewhere;
- Recognise intercultural issues relevant to their professional practice;
• Appreciate the importance of multicultural diversity to professional practice and citizenship;
• Appreciate the complex and interacting factors that contribute to notions of culture and cultural relationships;
• Value diversity of language and culture;
• Appreciate and demonstrate the capacity to apply international standards and practices within the discipline or professional area; and
• Demonstrate awareness of the implications of local decisions and actions for international communities and of international decisions and actions for local communities.

McLoughlin (2001) suggests that students who learn in an environment where multiple and diverse perspectives are fostered and appreciated become better critical thinkers, better communicators, better problem-solvers and better team players.

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**Changing staff perspectives**

Internationalisation is not only about changing the perspectives of Australian students, but also about appreciating and responding positively to the needs and perceptions of overseas students. Biggs (1999) notes that international students may experience three kinds of problems: socio-cultural adjustment, language issues and teaching/learning issues relating to different expectations and perspectives on learning.

Internationalisation is also about changing the perceptions and assumptions of teachers about foreign students. International students are often perceived to be too teacher dependent, lacking in independent study skills, and tending to adopt rote learning strategies. However, the research indicates that international students often outperform their peers academically and that such conceptions may be misguided (Kember, 2000). For example, Chinese students typically appear to Western teachers to be rote learners, but memorising and understanding are regarded by many students not as interrelated processes that complement each other, resulting in high quality learning outcomes. For Chinese students, the intention of repetition and memorisation is to develop a `deep impression' and discover new meaning, whereas for Western students, repetition is to check that they had really remembered something. Typically, Western students see understanding as a process of sudden insight whereas Chinese students often think of understanding as a long process that requires considerable mental effort.

Monash University also has well-developed guidelines for undertaking the process of internationalisation (online at [http://www.celts.monash.edu.au/html/](http://www.celts.monash.edu.au/html/)). Among these are key questions that enable a stock take of the existing situation in a School or Department. For example:

### Questions for staff

- What is the cultural mix of staff? Provide explicit opportunities for staff to discuss their expertise and experience in relation to the curriculum.
- In what ways do students already study international practices and development? Can these be developed/expanded?
- Are staff undertaking overseas consultancies? If so, are students prepared for similar work.
- What is the extent of staff involvement in international dialogue? Some possible areas to explore: preparing the students for participation, identifying issues as they emerge and providing opportunities to reflect on them, debriefing their expectations and experience, getting them to compare notes with each other and with the international partners.
- Global issues and forces. What ways of talking about globalisation can students identify? What relation do students see between themselves and global processes - are they targets, participants, clients, victims?
- Inclusive curriculum processes. Do students have the opportunity to discuss what they are learning in relation to their own cultural or geographical context? Do students have the opportunity to discuss what they are learning in relation to more than one cultural or geographical context? Do students have the opportunity to evaluate the relevance of theory in more than one context? Is the curriculum designed to capitalise on the different backgrounds from which students come and to develop links between students from different backgrounds?

### Questions about students

- To what extent are students able to apply theoretical concepts to local/regional experiences and examples?
- Do they understand the biases within your discipline towards one tradition?
- Can they explain the global nature of scientific, economic, political and cultural exchange?
- Do they have the opportunity to work with staff/students from international locations?
• Are they asked to critique/evaluate global issues/perspectives?
• Can they demonstrate specific knowledge of similarities as well as differences in the professional practices in their field among different cultures?
• Are they expected to locate and use international content related to professional and academic tasks.
• Are they asked to develop and test alternative hypotheses to explain differences in how problems are defined, analyzed or communicated in intercultural settings?
• Can they identify ethical issues that may arise in their personal and professional lives in international/intercultural contexts?
• Do they identify the major limitations and problems in their personal and professional lives that arise from ethnocentrism?
• Can they identify the major demographic trends which provide the context for international/intercultural relations in their field of study?

Making change at the unit level – strategies and activities

Internationalisation strategies at the course or unit level may represent major change or may be as simple as adopting a new instructional strategy to foster international understanding. There are many instances where an existing strategy or activity can be modified to accommodate an international perspective. Some examples are shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existing curriculum</th>
<th>Internationalised curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>Comparative case study – where one or more cases is from another culture/region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students work in groups</td>
<td>Student groups to include at least one ‘remote’ student. Pair up a local student with a remote student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulletin board discussion of content issues</td>
<td>Bulletin board used to focus on comparative issues. Student share personal ‘stories’ or personal perspectives on the ‘international’ content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research project</td>
<td>Comparative research study. Exchange of information or data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texts, readings and examples mostly local/Australian</td>
<td>Texts, readings and examples to include materials relevant to, or suitable for various overseas contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students submit own problem-solving work</td>
<td>Students comment on the work of another (anonymous?) student – giving their own perspectives or relating judgements to their own assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placements and locations</td>
<td>Study abroad / exchange possibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local visiting speakers</td>
<td>Overseas speakers / speakers with international experience/focus/reputation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Units offered only from within the faculty</td>
<td>Consider units for broadening international perspectives – Asian, European or Australian cultural or language studies – a ‘minor’ in another area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative perspectives offered from readings</td>
<td>Alternative perspectives offered by the students themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of impact of cultural differences –</td>
<td>Workshop in class – students list the issues and how one should/would respond in their own culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from written or official documentation</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**References**


