

INTERNATIONALISATION OF CURRICULUM

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RMIT University has been enormously successful in its international activities. More than 7,000 international students are enrolled at its Melbourne campuses, with a further 5,500 undertaking RMIT courses in various offshore locations under a variety of different collaborative arrangements. Every faculty is involved. RMIT's research links around the world are extensive. Its Study Abroad Programs are robust, and its international work-experience placements are expanding. The University has developed highly effective structures for advising and supporting international students. RMIT professes a commitment to the internationalisation of curriculum of all its courses.

Many of these international activities were developed some years ago. They were based on a range of market strategies designed to increase the number of international students and to expand the University's financial base. At this RMIT has been enormously successful. But for RMIT to become a truly global university, growth in student numbers alone is not sufficient. A new paradigm for conceptualising internationalisation appears necessary, that takes into account the rapidly changing context in which education now takes place.

A global university must now be characterised by its engagement with the processes of globalisation, its international networks and its internationalised curriculum. The field of international education has matured in recent years, with the greater recognition of how it uniquely spans the cultural, economic

and interpersonal dimensions of global relations. In the past, Australia's approach to international education was too narrowly commercial, with insufficient recognition of its transformative power, its capacity to radically re-position RMIT as a university responsive to contemporary global changes.

The context in which higher education now occurs has been re-shaped by globalisation. Much has been said and written in recent years about globalisation. Some of it is hype. But a great deal of it is seeking to understand the profound global changes are helping to integrate the world into one extensive system. Recent developments in information and communication technologies, for example, involve knowledge production and exchange that defy traditional disciplinary and cultural boundaries. This has resulted in a major shift towards international integration of products and markets. National institutions are still significant in the global environment but now must become engaged in the global processes or face obsolescence.

International competition and technological change is associated with a workplace that is more integrated and more devolved, and requires higher levels of cognitive and communication skills. The post-Fordist vision of flatter organisational structures demands high participation, strong teams, multi-skilling and life-long learning in order to stay competitive. The future of work is increasingly shaped by technology, the capacity of labour and change management. Competitive advantage is determined by capacity for continuous innovation and by a workplace culture that is self- and skill- reflective—that is, a workplace in which workers can put into practice their own judgements

about the skills and knowledge they require in order to meet the needs of technology and competition.

The contemporary context is also characterised by the changing global knowledge economy. Among other features this includes: an exponential increase in the amount of knowledge; an acceleration in the rapid movement of knowledge globally; a growth in the centres of knowledge creation; a huge development in knowledge-mediated industries and services; changes in the access to and control over knowledge; and the emergence of new ways of thinking about the links between knowledge and innovation.

The traditional links between knowledge and culture are also changing, with a greater recognition that knowledge creation and use is mediated by cultures. The changing nature of the knowledge economy involves an intricate global–local relationship. It suggests that the nature of knowledge use and innovation demands a simultaneous engagement with local factors as well as global processes. This is so because in cultural terms the local is now re-shaped globally, and because the idea of global is meaningless without its local references.

These remarks highlight the importance of looking at globalisation through the lense of the changing nature of social relations its spawns. In the new context, the changing boundaries of nationhood, geography, ethnicity, class and gender have become fluid and shifting. The changes that we now experience come partly from increasing exposure to cultural diversity through

the influences of international news and media, information and communication technologies and consumer products as well as greater mobility. These increases in cultural globalisation are experienced as pressure towards both heterogeneity and homogeneity at the same time, a resurgence of localised cultural identities as well as the development of globalised cultural practices. The global context is defined by a language that highlights cultural aspects of economic relations, and the need to develop products that are responsive to local needs, values and traditions.

In terms of these considerations, one possible definition of the internationalisation of education is to view it as both an expression of and response to the processes of globalisation—the global context described above. However, the relationship between what might be viewed as the global context and educational goals is not a simple one. This is so because what is seen as ‘the context’ is never self-evident, but always requires interpretation. Descriptions of global processes are highly contested, as are the suggestions about how best to explain them, respond to them, react to them or indeed to use them for our competitive advantage. The questions we might ask about the implications of globalisation are often as complex and as pertinent as are the possible answers.

In terms of the internationalisation of education, what this suggests is a curriculum approach that seeks to provide students with skills of inquiry and analysis rather than a set of facts about globalisation. Since we are confronted a fast-changing knowledge economy, students need to develop

questioning skills so that they are able to identify the sources of knowledge, assess claims of its validity and legitimacy, examine its local relevance and significance, determine its uses and applications and speculate about how it might be challenged and refuted. The ability to think reflectively and critically about knowledge creation and use requires a form of global imagination; the capacity to determine how knowledge is globally linked, no matter how locally specific its uses.

The internationalisation of higher education thus involves a complex of global processes concerning conceptions of knowledge, economic exchange, the changing nature of work and labour requirements and cultural diversity.

Internationalisation is relevant to all facets of university life, including teaching and learning, research and development and institutional management. It demands a holistic approach to change. It does not affect RMIT's international students only, but is relevant to the experiences of all of its students and staff.

Internationalisation of curriculum entails a complex interplay between history, politics, knowledge development and its use, as well as teaching and learning. With increasing global flows in communication and movement, we are now all influenced by globalisation, which as we have noted above, can be characterised as a process of transformation in which various practices are increasingly geared to operating in international surroundings, under international market conditions and with an international professional orientation. If this is so then internationalised curriculum involves the

development of new skills, attitudes and knowledge among students and staff alike. It requires the creation of new learning practices, spaces, ethos and cultures. This cannot be done by a university edit but through the creative utilisation of the imagination of all those who make up that university. This imagination itself needs to be globalised in ways that are both self-reflexive and critical. Internationalisation of curriculum should therefore be seen as a dynamic process which gives staff and students the opportunity to own the processes of their own learning and knowledge production.

This view should greatly extend and re-shape our current understanding of the idea of the internationalisation of curriculum. It should not mean those curricular activities that are designed exclusively for international students or courses that are offered off-shore or curricula that lead to joint or double degrees with partner institutions. Nor should it be restricted to interdisciplinary studies of particular regions of the world such as Asian Studies or to curricula that lead to qualifications which are internationally recognised or to the addition of a comparative dimension to traditional content or indeed to the programs designed to enhance international student's capacity to survive Australian mainstream curriculum.

The idea of internationalisation of curriculum can be seen as much more radical, referring to the integration of a global perspective in both curriculum design and development and evaluation. What this means is that curriculum content should not arise out of a singular cultural base but should engage critically with the global plurality of the sources of knowledge. It should not

only respond to the needs of the local community but should seek to give students knowledge and skills that assist their global engagement. It should encourage students to explore how knowledge is now produced, distributed and utilised globally. It should help them develop an understanding of the global nature of economic, political and cultural exchange. In short, it should assist them in the development of not only global understanding but also global imagination.

Significantly, however, the idea of the internationalisation of curriculum should not be concerned with content alone. It should also address issues of pedagogy and cross-cultural understanding. With demographic changes in our classrooms, the issue of how to cater for and take advantage of individual and cultural differences in learning should become crucial in the development of effective pedagogies. The emergence of new communication technologies has created the possibilities of new learning spaces designed to link students to the global networks of information and ideas.

With internationalisation, cultural diversity has become a permanent feature of university life. To RMIT, this diversity is its greatest strength and asset. It is an essential characteristic of a dynamic and creative society that is able to engage effectively with global forces and to meet the challenges of the new century. Internationalisation of curriculum therefore should incorporate a range of values that include openness, tolerance and cosmopolitanism. It should demand culturally inclusive behaviour, designed to ensure that cultural differences are heard and explored, that curriculum is a product of the

determination to learn from other cultures and that there are a wide variety of factors that affect cultural change.

Finally, the internationalisation of curriculum requires both students and staff to become more self-reflexive about what they teach and how students learn. It also demands new practices of assessment and evaluation that are culturally sensitive and inclusive. If analysis and self-reflexivity are considered pedagogically important then such assessment practices should reward innovation and critical engagement. If RMIT is to prepare students for a world of ever-changing global knowledge economies and social relations then the goal of 'professional and vocational education' should not only be defined in terms of the global nature of work and economic and cultural exchange but also based on the premise that these matters are subject to continuous change. Preparing students to see change as positive and to manage it effectively in a global context should be a central aim of an internationalised curriculum.