Internationalising the curriculum

The information on these pages has been developed as part of the Teaching International Students project.
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1. Introduction

Curriculum content and the pedagogical approaches used by teachers are key vehicles for improving teaching and learning for all students.

Internationalising the curriculum involves providing students with global perspectives of their discipline and giving them a broader knowledge base for their future careers. You can also help to provide them with a set of values and skills to operate in diverse cultural environments; skills often labelled ‘intercultural competencies’ or ‘cross-cultural capabilities’. These values, skills and knowledge are discussed in the literature in relation to graduate attributes and global citizenship with an acknowledgement that graduates today will need the resilience and competencies to communicate and compete in a rapidly changing, complex global workforce and world.

2. The main issues: getting started

A key question is what internationalisation might mean at the disciplinary level, for example, what should an engineering, psychology or arts curriculum look like if it is to meet the needs of the student? There is often not as much guidance at the level of curriculum content as might be expected although clearly much work is currently being done in this area. This type of work provides an exciting opportunity as by engaging with your communities of practice, such as professional bodies, you can listen to, debate and contribute to the process of curriculum internationalisation within your subject area.

Some disciplines are already ‘internationalised’ (such as International Studies, Comparative Religions etc.) or lend themselves to internationalisation more easily. Internationalisation could mean providing a broader knowledge base through including conceptual and theoretical work from non-Western sources; providing opportunities for practice in diverse cultural contexts; or examining practice in the discipline in different parts of the world. The ultimate aim is to better equip students with the knowledge and skills they will need in their future careers as well as to generate and pluralise knowledge.

3. Possible solutions: suggestions for action

- Consider with students how knowledge/content might be alternatively constructed in different cultures.
- Ensure that learning outcomes include values and skills as well as knowledge.
- Discuss relevant ethical issues in international contexts.
- Give time in sessions to considering how professional practice might differ across the world.

4. Top tip

Build-in experiential learning so that students can experience and reflect on the intercultural aspects of their learning alongside the core disciplinary learning.
5. Top resources

If you only have a short time to explore the issues raised here then a good place to start is the Centre for Curriculum Internationalisation at Oxford Brookes University.

Internationalisation of the curriculum in action website


If you wish to explore these issues more deeply, the contribution by Dr Viv Caruana of the Centre for Academic Practice and Research in Internationalisation (accessible from the download page of this section) gives an excellent overview of key concepts and debates as well as detailed suggestions for action.

6. What is the evidence?

There is considerable literature on the internationalisation of the curriculum, particularly at the conceptual level (for a review see Caruana and Spurling, 2007 accessible on the download page for this section). With respect to content some academics in this area have argued that internationalisation should be deeply embedded into the curriculum so that its very foundations are multicultural.

The internationalisation of a discipline is complex and will mean different things in different disciplines. It does not merely refer to the addition of a few ‘international’ examples, but rather, according to Webb (2005) ‘is more radical and refers to the integration of a global perspective to curriculum development. This means that content does not arise out of a single cultural base but engages with global plurality in terms of sources of knowledge (Webb, 2005).

6.1 Further reading:


Joining up agendas: internationalisation and equality and diversity in HE (2011) Equality Challenge Unit [Senior management briefing on the benefits of developing joined-up working between equality and diversity and internationalisation].

7. Related resources


A teacher from Loughborough University reflects on internationalising Computer Science curricula

Giving a broader perspective using culturally varied examples. - Chris Ennew et al. University of Nottingham

The Centre for Curriculum Internationalisation at Oxford Brookes University

Internationalisation Research - Leeds Metropolitan University
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