

# A Conceptual Framework for Internationalisation of the Curriculum

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## Introduction

Internationalisation in higher education is important in both the local and the global contexts within which universities operate and internationalisation of the curriculum is a critical component of any university's internationalisation strategy. A broad definition of curriculum is useful when considering internationalisation of the curriculum (Jones & Killick 2007). Such a view is inclusive of all aspects of the learning/teaching situation and both the formal curriculum (the syllabus and the planned experiences and activities that students undertake) as well as the informal curriculum and the hidden curriculum (Leask 2009).

The formal curriculum is the planned and sequenced programme of teaching and learning activities organised around defined content areas and assessed in various ways. The informal curriculum includes the various extra-curricular activities that take place on campus. It is an important part of the landscape in which the formal curriculum is enacted. The hidden curriculum includes the incidental lessons that are learned about power and authority, and about what and whose knowledge is valued and not valued, from the way the curriculum is organised and enacted. In the formal curriculum essential considerations include what international as well as 'at home' learning experiences will be provided to assist all students to develop specified international and intercultural learning outcomes, how learning in relation to these outcomes will be assessed and how

study abroad and exchange are integrated into the curriculum at home.

The selections made will individually and collectively have an impact on student learning. In the informal curriculum, decisions concerning what services, opportunities for experience and extension beyond the formal curriculum will be provided are important. For example Leask (2009) describes the way in which a mentoring programme has been used to internationalise the informal curriculum. The extent to which campus culture expects and rewards intercultural interaction can have a profound effect on students. In the hidden curriculum questions such as: 'Whose knowledge is valued and privileged?'; 'Is the rationale for the selection explained?' and 'Are academics aware of why they make these choices and of the messages they are inadvertently sending through their choices?' are critical in the process of IoC (Leask 2009). Together, the formal, informal and hidden curricula comprise the student experience.



## The Conceptual Framework

In 1997 Knight observed that ‘internationalisation means different things to different people, and as a result there is a great diversity of interpretations attributed to the concept’ and furthermore that ‘this diversity can also lead to confusion and a weakened sense of legitimacy as to its value and benefits to higher education’ (Knight 1997, p. 5). Lee (2000) noted that interpretations of internationalisation have depended largely on local settings, so that ‘what may at first appear to be similar policies may end up being quite different practices’ (Lee 2000, p. 329). In exploring the meaning of internationalisation of the curriculum in their programmes with different groups of academic staff it soon became clear that these statements were also relevant for internationalisation of the curriculum. There were many meanings attributed to the term ‘internationalisation of the curriculum’ and many different views of what an internationalised curriculum might look like. Factors such as the rationale, policy and mission of the university in relation to internationalisation and the history of internationalisation

in their region as well as disciplinary background influenced understandings of the meaning of internationalisation of the curriculum in different programmes. Different groups, and individuals within groups, ascribed different levels of relative importance to the different layers of context within which they worked. Hence context influenced curriculum design decisions in different ways.

A conceptual framework of internationalisation of the curriculum that connects curriculum design and the disciplines with layers of context was developed (see Figure 1). Each layer of context directly and indirectly interacts with and influences the others, creating a complex set of conditions influencing curriculum design in and across the disciplines. The conceptual framework explains the divergence in the understandings of internationalisation and IoC within and across regions, countries, universities and disciplines. It helps to clarify why understandings of IoC may vary between disciplines in the one institution, or between the same discipline in different institutions. The framework is described in detail below.

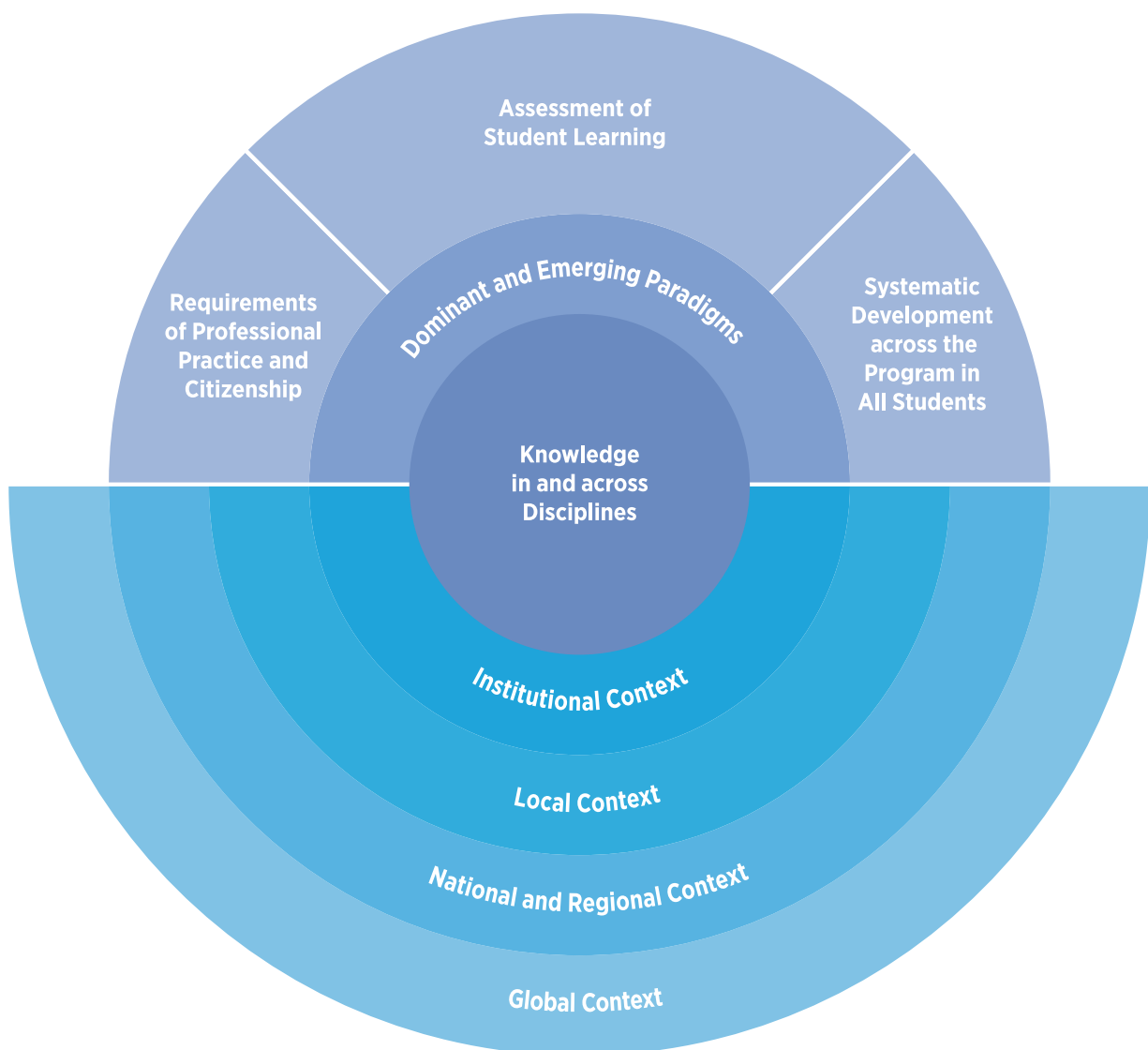


Figure 1. A conceptual framework of internationalisation of the curriculum

## Knowledge in and across the Disciplines

Knowledge in and across disciplines is at the centre of the framework. While the concept of 'an academic discipline' is to some degree contestable 'people with any interest and involvement with academic affairs seem to have little difficulty in understanding what a discipline is' (Becher & Trowler 2001, p. 41). The disciplines are the foundation of knowledge (Mestenhauser 2011) and they have very distinct cultures (Becher & Trowler 2001). Thus they are themselves culturally bound and to some degree constricted. Disciplines are the group or 'tribe' to which academics are primarily aligned. Individuals are socialised into these exclusive global communities, the tribe, and through that process develop a sense of identity and personal commitment to shared values and particular ways of doing, thinking and being (Becher & Trowler 2001).

However 'the evolution of some disciplines has perpetuated a relatively narrow focus impoverished by an absence of intercultural and international perspectives, conceptualizations and data' (Bartell 2003, p. 49). Clifford (2009) also found that views on IoC of academics do appear to be related to their discipline background. Thus the disciplines are at the centre of the framework, as the starting point and primary influence on interpretations of meaning in relation to internationalisation of the curriculum.

The **top half of the framework (Figure 1)** is concerned with **curriculum design**. It identifies three key elements

- the requirements of professional practice and citizenship
- assessment of student learning
- systematic development of knowledge, skills and attitudes across the programme

Academic staff make curriculum decisions primarily according to the dominant paradigms within their disciplines.

## Dominant and Emerging Paradigms

The process of curriculum design involves a series of choices about whose knowledge will be included and what skills and attitudes will be developed. Discipline communities have their own recognisable cultures and are to some degree constricted in thought and action by the paradigms within which they work. Thus critical decisions about what and what not to include in the curriculum, how to teach and how to assess learning are often decided, by default, according to dominant paradigms, with little if any consideration being given to alternative models and ways of developing and disseminating knowledge, practising a profession or viewing the world.

An important part of the process of internationalisation of the curriculum is to think beyond dominant paradigms, to explore emerging paradigms and imagine new possibilities and new ways of thinking and doing. This is a challenging task for academic staff. They have been socialised into their discipline. Through that process they have developed a

sense of identity and personal commitment to the shared values and associated ways of doing, thinking and being embedded within the dominant paradigms of their discipline communities. Thus, academic staff are themselves culturally bound by their own disciplinary training and thinking (Becher & Trowler 2002; Clifford 2009).

## Requirements of Professional Practice and Citizenship

The requirements of professional practice are important considerations when decisions are being made about what and what not to include in a curriculum, especially when the programme is accredited by an external professional body. But a university education is not just about training for demands of professional practice in a globalised world. The moral responsibilities that come with local, national and global citizenship are also important considerations when planning an internationalised curriculum.



### The key questions to be considered are:

- What international and intercultural knowledge skills and attitudes will be required of graduates as professionals?
- What international and intercultural knowledge skills and attitudes will they need to be responsible global citizens?

## Assessment of Student Learning

An important consideration in curriculum design is what you would expect students to be able to do at the end of a programme and as graduates. This can then be used to plan assessments tasks and learning experiences in different courses at different levels in the programme, ensuring that students are provided with regular feedback on how they are performing and progressing. In an internationalised curriculum it is important to specifically provide feedback on and assess student achievement of clearly articulated international and intercultural learning goals.



### The key questions to be considered are:

- What will students need to be able to do to demonstrate that they have developed the knowledge, skills and attitudes we have identified as required for professional practice and citizenship in a globalised world?
- How and when will progress and achievement be measured?
- What feedback will students get along the way?

## Systematic Development across the Programme

The development of international and intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes in an internationalised curriculum requires careful planning, collaboration with colleagues and coordination across a programme of study. The development of skills such as language capability and intercultural competence may need to be embedded in a number of courses at different levels. Given that not all students will enter the programme with the same capabilities, a range of strategies to assist all students to achieve desired learning outcomes by the end of the programme are likely to be required. Finding ways in which student services and the informal curriculum can support the work undertaken in the formal curriculum is an important part of curriculum design. Mapping where desired knowledge, skills and attitudes will be developed and assessed in the formal curriculum is also necessary.



### The key questions to be considered are:

- Where will students be given the opportunity to develop the identified knowledge, skills and attitudes in the formal and the informal curriculum across the degree programme?
- How will we ensure that all students are provided with appropriate opportunities to develop a minimum level of knowledge, skills and attitudes across the degree programme?
- What opportunities can we provide for extension and the achievement of excellence?

The **bottom half of the conceptual framework (Figure 1)** is concerned with the layers of context which have a variable influence on the decisions academic staff make as they design the curriculum.

## Institutional Context

Universities are always under pressure to adapt their policies, priorities and focus in response to 'rapidly changing social, technological, economic and political forces emanating from the immediate as well as from the broader post-industrial external environment' (Bartell 2003, p. 43). This includes the need to prepare students with knowledge and skills needed in a job market 'which is increasingly global in character' (Bartell 2003, p. 44; see also Mestenhauser 1998).

Since the early 2000s there has been a focus on the development of a range of graduate attributes in the policies of universities in Australia (Barrie 2006) and elsewhere. While they are described almost universally as the knowledge, skills and understandings that university

students will develop during their time with the institution (Bowden et al. 2002), they have been implemented in a variety of ways. Approaches include a focus on a few loosely described 'generic' attributes, a broader range of more specific attributes defined with reference to the discipline and program of study and various other approaches in between. References to the development of international and intercultural perspectives in students and the development of global citizens are, however, common in statements of intent in universities in Australia and, indeed, across the world. Interpreting such statements is a logical focus of activity around IoC.

Institutional mission, ethos, policies and priorities related to which international partners they work with, how and why, will have an impact on academic staff and students through the programmes that are taught and the research that informs them. Specific curriculum policies, such as those related to the preparation of graduates to live and work in a globalised economy and society, will also influence the approach taken to IoC in programmes of study.

Each institution has its own unique mission, ethos, policies and priorities. The formal curriculum does not operate in isolation of these. They are reflected in various ways in policies (such as in 'graduate attributes' statements), the range and focus of degrees offered (such as the availability of and requirement for foreign language study and recognition of concurrent global experience programmes), funding priorities (such as to what extent international service learning is supported), international partnerships and staff development opportunities.

The informal curriculum is also an important part of the institutional context. The various extra-curricular activities and services available to students are an important part of the context in which the formal curriculum is enacted within an institution. Together, the formal and the informal curriculum define the total student experience. Both will, to some extent, be shaped by university mission and ethos.



### The key questions to be considered are:

- What mission, ethos, policies and priorities relating to internationalisation are dominant?
- What services, opportunities for experience and extension exist to support internationalisation beyond the formal curriculum?
- How can I connect with them?
- What else might be possible?



## Local Context

Cross, Mhlanga and Ojo (2011) argue that 'the university is simultaneously global/universal, local, and regional', operating at 'the interface of the global and the local' (p. 77). Developing students' abilities to be ethical and responsible local citizens who appreciate the connections between the local, the national and the global is an important aspect of internationalisation of the curriculum. The local context includes social, cultural, political and economic conditions. All may provide opportunities and challenges for internationalisation of the curriculum. For example, there may be opportunities for students to develop enabling intercultural skills, knowledge and attitudes through engagement with diversity in the local community. Local accreditation requirements for registration in a chosen profession may require a seemingly exclusive focus on local legislation and policy. However, the local context is reciprocally connected to national and global contexts. Developing all students understanding of these connections is an important part of the process of developing their ability to be critical and reflexive citizens and professionals able to think and act locally, nationally and globally.



### The key questions to be considered are:

- How does global interconnectivity and interdependence influence local conditions for professionals and citizens?
- How do local social, cultural, political and economic conditions and actions impact on professional practice?
- How might variation in these conditions in here and other places, now and in the future, impact on graduates as professionals and citizens?
- What responsibilities will graduates have as professionals and citizens in this interconnected world?

## National and Regional Context

Different national and regional contexts will determine to some extent the options available to those seeking to internationalise the curriculum. In different regions and within different countries within a region, factors such as size, economic strength, international status and language of the country as well as the academic reputation of the national system of higher education interact in unique ways to drive and shape internationalisation goals (Teichler 2004). Regional and national matters and related government policies around internationalisation are the background against which institutions formulate policy and academic staff do or do not engage in IoC. For example, policies concerning foreign language learning and support for student mobility,

the recruitment of international students and the extent to which universities are connected with others in the region will all influence approaches to internationalisation of the curriculum. Different national and regional contexts will to some extent determine the options available.



### The key questions to be considered are:

- What culture of internationalisation dominates in the region? Why?
- What opportunities does this culture of internationalisation provide for students and graduates?
- What limitations does it impose?
- How can we utilise the opportunities and overcome the limitations to internationalise the curriculum?
- What is likely, possible and desirable in the future?

## Global Context

World society is not one in which global resources and power are shared equally - 'globalisation is being experienced as a discriminatory and even oppressive force in many places' (Soudien 2005, p. 501). It has contributed to increasing the gap between the rich and the poor of the world, and the exploitation of the 'South' by the 'North'. This domination is not only economic. It is also intellectual. Globalisation has transformed higher education throughout the world, contributing to the dominance of Western educational models (Marginson 2003). They now define 'what is knowledge and who is qualified to understand and apply that knowledge' (Goodman 1984, p. 13), what research questions are asked, who will investigate them and if and how the results will be applied (Carter 2008). This has narrowed the options for everyone.

There is a need for those working in education in both the developed and the developing world to challenge the neo-liberal construction of globalisation (Mok 2007). In the process of IoC curriculum designers and teachers might, for example, consider the kind of world we currently live in and the kind of world they would want to create, through their graduates. The way in which they answer these questions will have an impact on what they teach (whose knowledge), what sort of experiences they incorporate into the curriculum and what sort of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and attitudes) they seek to develop in their graduates.



### The key questions to be considered are:

- What kind of world do we live in?
- What kind of world do we want?
- How can we best prepare our students to participate ethically and responsibly in the world today and in the future, as both professionals and citizens?

## Concluding Remarks

Each contextual layer of the framework directly and indirectly interacts with and influences the others. This creates a complex set of conditions within which the curriculum is constructed by academic staff and experienced by students.

Hence we find that conceptualisations and enactments of internationalisation of the curriculum vary between disciplines in the one institution, and in the same discipline in different institutions. For example, some disciplines are less open to recognising the cultural construction of knowledge than others and the international perspectives required of a nurse or a pharmacist will most likely focus more on socio-cultural understanding than those of an engineer. Some will be more influenced by the requirements of local employers or national professional associations than others.

The work undertaken during the Fellowship, in Australia and abroad, as well as the international literature, informed the development of this conceptual framework. The framework explains the divergence in the understandings of internationalisation and IoC within and across regions, countries, universities and disciplines. It helps to clarify why understandings of IoC may vary between disciplines in the one institution, or between the same discipline in different institutions.

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