

Window to the World: Internationalising Teaching Contents and the Curriculum

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A university is, by nature, an entity that embraces cosmopolitan values (Svetlikand & Lalic, 2016) and “operates at the interface of the global and the local” (Cross, Mhlanga & Ojo 2011, p.77). However, not all the ideas of internationalisation are fully realised when responding to the increasingly frequent flows of people, ideas, and capital in tertiary institutions around the world (Ilieva, Beck & Waterstone, 2014). Knight (2004) defines internationalisation as the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education. Such a well-circulated definition has inspired universities worldwide to internationalise their curriculum (IoC). This briefing aims to unpack some of the complexities of these changes and revisions. We will look at three key questions: (1)What is IoC?, (2)Why is it important?, and (3)What are some of the approaches to IoC?

1. What We Talk About When We Talk About IoC?

In her book entitled *Internationalizing the Curriculum* (2015), Leask defines IoC as “the incorporation of international, intercultural and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods and support services of a programme of study” (p.9). Although it has been a reiterated reference in literature and discussions, it is by no means a simple working definition that can be easily translated into practices. In this regard, we seek to clarify what it means to “incorporate international, intercultural and global dimensions” into the formal and informal curriculum in the following two subsections.



1.1 International, Intercultural, and Global Dimensions

Leask makes a reference to Knight by underlining the importance of including “international, intercultural and/or global dimensions” in curriculum design. Clifford (2019) further explains IoC as follows:

“*Curricula, pedagogies and assessments that foster understanding of global perspectives and how these intersect and interact with the local and the personal; inter cultural capabilities in terms of actively engaging with other cultures; and responsible citizenship in terms of addressing differing value systems and subsequent actions* (p.135).”

In short, international, intercultural and/or global dimensions could be realised in the following aspects: (a) development of multiple perspectives, (b) awareness of global-local interaction, (c) enhancement of intercultural competence, and (d) cultivation of responsible citizenship. The inputs of Clifford and Leask allow us to take a more comprehensive perspective to understand how students could be developed to achieve (a) – (d) in a study programme.

1.2 The Scope of a Curriculum

Leask further categorises student experience of a study programme into those brought by the formal curriculum, the informal curriculum as well as the hidden curriculum (2009). The formal curriculum refers to a series of compulsory teaching and learning activities organised around defined subject areas. The informal curriculum (also known as the co-curriculum) provides students with voluntary learning opportunities that go beyond the formal experience. The hidden curriculum allows students to learn about power and authority constructed within a discipline; about what and whose knowledge is (not) valued from the way the formal and informal curriculum are organised and enacted (Leask, 2016). Together, the three curricula sew the internationalised teaching content into a coherent programme via the careful design of learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods and support services.

2. Why is IoC Important?

It is common to discuss IoC together with the idea of internationalisation at home (IaH) (Bodycott, Mak & Ramburuth, 2014; Knight, 2003; Leask, 2016; Woodfield, 2016). IaH capitalises on the incorporation of intercultural dimensions into the curriculum for all students within domestic learning environment (Beelen & Jones, 2015) while it also consolidates the commitment of IoC to nurture globally capable graduates indiscriminately, regardless of their ability and incentive to engage in learning abroad opportunities. To summarise in the words of Woodfield (2016), IaH allows “mobile students to apply their knowledge and skills gained from mobility into their learning upon their return” while “the non-mobile majority of students to benefit from mobility” (p.4).

The following sections look into the key strategies to bring out the internationalisation learning outcomes (a)-(d) via classroom teaching inside and outside the classroom in both the formal and informal curriculum. In addition to literature, we will illustrate the ideas by citing case examples collected from The University of Hong Kong, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and Hong Kong Baptist University by interviews and presentations.



3. Internationalisation of Teaching Contents

To start with, teachers can guide students to compare and contrast practices and/or standpoints adopted by various countries or communities. Zou and Cheung (2016) remind that the essence of the comparisons lays not only in whether students identify the similarities and differences, but also in whether they can critically explain and respect the cultural forces shaping these practices and standpoints. We have shortlisted some examples from our interviews below:

- In a course on Global Health Ethics, the teacher attempted to enhance students’ awareness of respecting local cultures and practices by exposing them to international and local public health standards of Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong during the 1970s. Students were also asked to examine the different vaccine experiment standards adopted by Thailand and some African countries (see the case example of Chow).
- In a compulsory English course for all first-year students, the teacher engaged students of diverse disciplines and backgrounds in language learning by assigning them a topic that appealed to all mankind: beauty. In addition to assigning reading materials that introduced students to different perceptions of beauty, the teacher put videos from Mauritania in western Africa against the dieting culture in Asia to illustrate how women of different sizes are regarded as beautiful in different cultures. Furthermore, the class investigated how males undergoing surgery are perceived and interpreted worldwide (see the case example of Megan).
- In a course on Social Communication and Advertising, the teacher questioned the relevance of talking her students through the “classic” consumer behaviours theories and case examples developed in the United States in the 1980s. To better connect students with their knowledge, the teacher engaged students in (re)investigating the applicability of the textbook theories in the 21st century Hong Kong—where they were having their studies—as well as collecting case examples relevant to the local context (see the case example of Chan).

4. Internationalisation of the Curriculum

Apart from internationalising teaching content at the classroom level, teachers may also enhance students’ intercultural competence by creating opportunities for authentic intercultural interactions at the course and programme level. The ultimate goal for such interaction is to provide a safe space where different voices and thoughts shaped by different cultures are solicited and treated equally with respect (Leask, 2008).

4.1 Bridging Theory and Application

Teachers attempt to build an atmosphere of intercultural exchange in the classroom through engaging students as learning resources. Specifically, teachers would supplement theoretical discussion by engaging students of diverse backgrounds to share practices in their home countries and mobilising the class to reflect on the variation in theory application. In cases when in-class diversity is less significant, connecting students with academics, field experts, and members of social communities for face-to-face communication would be value-adding. We have gathered two vivid cases in point:

- A teacher from the Department of Journalism founded the Data and News Society for journalists, teachers, and students from diverse institutions and working backgrounds to share experience regularly in the form of a community of practice which helped bridge the gap between theory and practice in the Journalism curriculum (see the example of Du).
- A teaching team incorporated elements of experiential learning (EL) into five courses under a BSc Speech and Hearing Science programme to help students acquire first-hand experience in engaging with a culturally diverse community of Hong Kong. Precisely, each course provided students the opportunity to undertake a fieldtrip, an observation or a community project where they engaged with Hong Kong students, ethnic minority pupils and adults, cross-border students as well as new arrivals from Mainland China. The participating students were assessed on the basis of (1) a group presentation as to whether they could apply theories and concepts learnt in class to the experiential learning, and (2) an individual reflective journal which demonstrated their ability to identify and reflect on critical learning events that had happened in the learning process. The teachers remarked that such experience also enhanced students' confidence in communicating more effectively in the future when working with students and parents from diverse backgrounds (see the case example of Barrett, Chan, Ma, Wong, Yiu & Harfitt).



4.2 Bridging the Gap between Formal and Informal Curriculum

Teachers are encouraged to work closely with their departments to engage students in intercultural and interdisciplinary exchanges in the form of supporting services and activities outside the formal curriculum. We have collated some exemplary practices from our community members as below:

- A programme coordinator of European Studies developed a telecollaborative language enhancement project to prepare his students for the mandatory exchange year. Each student at the home university was paired with a student undertaking studies about teaching German as a foreign language in Germany. Instead of assigning the latter to be the "language tutor" of the former, the pair was encouraged to co-investigate the challenges in German learning and teaching via the discussion of a global issue: What makes a city healthy? By grounding the language and cultural exchange on the exploration of common social issues, the teacher hoped that the students could communicate with less negative influence from the tutor-student hierarchy (see the case example of Chaudhuri).
- A teacher worked closely with the School of Business to extend the development of intercultural competences from the formal to informal curriculum by launching the Student Ambassador Scheme. It was also an initiative developed to address the issues that non-Cantonese speaking students were generally given fewer opportunities to engage in academic committees. The Scheme recruited full-time undergraduate students of mixed backgrounds to help organise public events for the university (see the example of Fung).
- In a course on European Economic and Business Life for final-year European Studies students, the teacher lined up field visits to some French companies based in Hong Kong. Directors and CEOs of the French companies were also invited to conduct face-to-face sharing sessions in the classroom. The teacher further enabled students to have a better preparation for the guest lectures and field visits by assigning them the relevant readings beforehand (see the case example of Tran).



5. A list of Options

We condense our main points into FIVE tips to provide teachers and curriculum designers a handy reference for internationalising teaching content and the curriculum.

1. Create opportunities for students to compare and contrast practices/standpoints adopted by different countries, cultures, or communities
2. Integrate theory and practice and situate students in authentic environments
3. Connect students with their peers, subject matter experts, professionals, and other stakeholders through intercultural and interdisciplinary exchanges, physically or virtually
4. Internationalise co-curricular learning experiences to support students' holistic learning
5. Create meaningful connections between formal and informal learning opportunities and experiences

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Case Examples

CASE
01

BIEN 6930A Global Health Ethics Case Studies (Chemical and Biological Engineering, HKUST)

The teacher incorporated elements of internationalised contents which helped widen students' international horizons and develop their intercultural competence. Drawing on international comparative case studies, the teacher attempted to enhance students' awareness of respecting various local cultures and practices. Examples of cases ranged from comparing the international and local public health standards of Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong during the 1970s to examining the different vaccine experiment standards adopted by Thailand and some African countries.

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CASE
02

LANG 1003 English for University Studies II (English Language, HKUST)

The teacher internationalised her class by drawing on interesting and thought-provoking examples from all over the world and presenting multiple perspectives to students when exploring global issues. In AY2018-19, beauty and happiness were selected as the themes of the course. Specifically, the teacher used videos from Mauritania in western Africa that contrast with the dieting phenomenon in Asia to illustrate how women of different sizes are regarded as beautiful, in addition to bringing in worldwide reading materials that introduced students to different perceptions of beauty. Moreover, the teacher included topics on male beauty and talked students through how males undergoing cosmetic surgery are perceived and interpreted worldwide. Another major topic covered in the course was happiness. After watching videos from different sources, students were guided to compare and contrast how happiness is defined in Bhutan, Denmark and America.

Students were assessed in a way that could advance their intercultural learning. Students had to submit an argumentative essay with their own theses. They could base their theses on the issues and phenomena in their home countries.

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CASE
03

GDBU1867 Children as Consumers: Marketing to the Youth (Communication Studies, HKBU)

The teacher wanted to ensure that not only the knowledge being delivered stay in tune with the global market, but that students could make connections with their knowledge, if not understand how it speaks to different local contexts. In the General Education course opened to students of all levels and disciplines, the teacher incorporated learning materials from her book, Youth and Consumption which comprised global and local content at a ratio of 4:6, into her class. The literature review generated from a global context was delivered as theory inputs while the Hong Kong-based findings and analysis of case examples consolidated in-class discussions. Note-worthily, some of the case examples referencing Hong Kong were collected by the former participants of the same course over years via the means of group or individual projects.

When it comes to assignments, students were asked to form mixed groups to conduct research on the parental socialisation of money management in which face-to-face interviews with Hong Kong parents were required. The non-local students were thus given a chance to have a deep conversation with local parents whereas the local students could collaborate with peers of diverse backgrounds in qualitative data analysis.

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CASE
04

Intercultural Engagement at Programme Level (Journalism, HKBU)

To further internationalise teaching and learning at home, a Small Private Online Course (SPOC) on "Data Journalism" has been created to connect HKBU Journalism majors with experts and learning partners from the DePaul University, Chicago and National Taiwan University. The course took place in Semester 1 of AY 2018/19. Dr. Du also founded the Data and News Society (<https://dnnsociety.org/>) and has invited journalists and teachers from diverse cultural and working backgrounds to give guest lectures to her students.

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**CASE
05****Intercultural Engagement at
Programme Level
(Speech and Hearing Sciences, HKU)**

Experiential learning (EL) can be used as one effective way to enhance internationalisation of teaching and learning because it provides students with real-life experiences in the field, often giving them opportunity to deal with complex problems and work with people from different backgrounds. Embedding EL into the formal curriculum enables students to apply academic knowledge to tackling real issues. Five courses in the BSc Speech and Hearing Sciences Programme are a vivid case in point. With a small scale EL incorporated into the formal curriculum, participating students had the opportunity to undertake a fieldtrip, an observation or a community project where they engaged with students and parents in Hong Kong's local community, which consists of Hong Kong students, ethnic minority pupils and adults, cross-border students as well as new arrivals from Mainland China. The students were assessed on the basis of (1) a group presentation as to whether they could apply theories and concepts learnt in class to the experiential learning, and (2) an individual reflective journal which demonstrated their ability to identify and reflect on critical learning events that had happened in the learning process. Such an incorporation of the EL component into the formal curriculum is suggested to help students acquire first-hand experience in engaging with a culturally diverse community of Hong Kong. More importantly, the experience aims to enhance students' confidence in communicating more effectively in the future when working with students and parents from diverse backgrounds.

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**CASE
06****Intercultural Engagement at
Programme Level (European Studies –
German Stream, HKBU)**

Other than learning everything about Germany, from language, history, culture, economy to international relations, students of the four-year BSocSc in European Studies programme (German Stream) are all entitled to a mandatory exchange year in Germany in Year 3. The programme coordinator was eager to add value to the signature study-abroad experience by designing pre-tour and post-tour interventions.

To prepare students for the journey, all the Year 2 European Studies (German Stream) majors were engaged in the "Giessen-Hong Kong Telecollaborative Language Learning Project". It connected the HKBU students with German-teacher-to-bes living in Germany for intercultural exchange and language enhancement. Rather than assigning the latter to be the "language tutor" of the former, the Project encouraged all students to co-investigate the challenges in German learning/teaching instead via the discussion of a global issue: What makes a city healthy? The teacher observed that, by deliberately grounding the language and cultural exchange on the exploration of common social issues, students could communicate in a more natural manner with less negative influence from the tutor-student hierarchy.

Upon returning from the exchange, the Year 4 students were offered

a course to consolidate their intercultural competence and get them ready for the global job market. They were arranged to meet a dozen of top leaders of German businesses from diverse sectors in Hong Kong either at their workplaces or in the classroom setting. The teacher further ensured that the students were well-prepared for the guest lectures and field visits by assigning them the relevant readings beforehand.

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**CASE
07****BUSI3006 Business Ethics and
Corporate Social Responsibility
(Business Administration, HKBU)**

The teacher created opportunities for students to investigate how global happenings interact with local situation in class. She asked students to share the waste disposal practices in their home countries. In line with the sharing, students were assigned to work in groups to discuss if these world-wide practices could be transferred to the place where they are having their studies i.e. Hong Kong. By engaging international students as learning inputs and assembling the class to reflect on local situations, the teacher enabled all students to take ownership of authentic cross-cultural comparisons.

In addition, Dr Fung worked closely with the School of Business to extend the development of intercultural competences from the formal to informal curriculum by launching the Student Ambassador Scheme. As an attempt to address the issue that non-Cantonese speaking students were given fewer opportunities to engage in academic committee on campus, the Scheme recruits full-time undergraduates of mixed backgrounds to help organise public events for the University.

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**CASE
08****EURO4006 European Economic and
Business Life (European Studies – French
Stream, HKBU)**

European Studies is, by nature, an internationalised programme with a compulsory one-year academic exchange in Europe. The course coordinator walks an extra mile to promote Internationalisation at Home by mobilizing external resources. Year 4 European Studies (French Stream) majors were arranged to meet a dozen of top leaders of French businesses from diverse sectors in Hong Kong in one semester, either at their offices or in the classroom setting. By engaging these practitioners with the students, the business community has become better informed about the study programme as well as the quality of its graduating students. As a result, there were more job opportunities being offered within the semester to the graduating students.

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