

Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia Conference 2017

INTERNATIONAL CURRICULUM IN PRACTICE

A PILOT STUDY OF THE COMMON CORE
CURRICULUM IN A UNIVERSITY IN HONG KONG

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BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

'In an age of rapid globalisation and intense regional and international competition, the UGC sees internationalisation and engagement with Mainland China as the key to Hong Kong's future, and believes that it should be actively pursued by the UGC-funded universities.'

(University Grants Committee of the HKSAR, 2017)

BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION (CONT'D)

- expand student diversity;
- promote diversity awareness and empowerment;
- extend opportunities for cross-cultural encounters, particularly amongst students;
- deepen multicultural components of campus life;
- increase opportunities for students to gain learning experiences in mainland China and overseas; and
- focus on quality in developing our more successful and mature internationalisation programmes.



INTERNATIONALISATION

To promote global citizenship and competitiveness, we plan to provide all students with at least one mainland China and one overseas learning opportunity by 2022.



INNOVATION

Is there life out there? Are we alone? We wish to continue encouraging critical questioning and thinking to innovate for change and social good.



INTERDISCIPLINARITY

By bringing together different and divergent minds, we aim to drive and catalyse new ways of thinking, new ideas and concepts and new ways of doing things.

IMPACT

From contributing to finding cures for the world's greatest diseases, promoting oral hygiene in developing countries, to rebuilding homes in China, our aim is to embed impact into all of our academic and educational outcomes.

BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION (CONT'D)



Is it relevant to me?

My programme/ course is very internationalised and it could not be better.

What am I supposed to do?

How internationalisation of the curriculum is put into practice?

LITERATURE REVIEW

What does 'internationalising the curriculum' suppose to mean?

- Internationalisation of the curriculum is an effort toward 'internationalisation at home' (Crowther et al., 2000; Harrison, 2015)
- The international and intercultural dimensions need to be incorporated into multiple aspects of a curriculum, for example, the content, teaching methods, assessment, delivery, and the support service (Leask, 2009; 2015)
- It benefits all students on campus by creating an international and multicultural learning environment rather than merely incoming or outgoing exchange students (Green & Whitsed, 2015)
- Not only focusing on bringing international related contents, but also about using new pedagogies and adopting cultural responsive approaches in teaching and learning (Zimitat, 2008).

LITERATURE REVIEW (CONT'D)

What happened in reality?

- There are often gaps between the institutional mission of internationalising the curriculum and the actual practices of teachers (e.g., Niehaus & Williams, 2016; Sanderson, 2011)
- Limited support regarding how those principles discussed in the literature can be realised in actual teaching practices (Sanderson, 2011)
- Common misconceptions about internationalising the curriculum – it is about teaching international students; it is about 'offshore' education; it is about sending students overseas; it is a generic curriculum that looks the same everywhere in the world (Leask, 2015, pp.11-12)

LITERATURE REVIEW (CONT'D)

Valuable resources have been produced internationally

- Arkoudis et al. (2013) – Enhancing effective interactions among students from diverse cultural backgrounds
- Deardorff (2009) – Interculturally competent teaching
- Jabbar and Hardaker (2012) – Culturally responsive teaching
- Leask and Carroll (2013) – Learning and teaching across cultures
- Ryan's edited book: Cross-cultural teaching and learning for home and international students

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Uniqueness in Hong Kong's education system

- 20% quota limit on the proportion of non-local students over the whole student body
- An interesting composition of non-local students (roughly 10% international and 10% mainland Chinese)
- The relative (perceived) advantage of local and non-local students
- English is the official language in universities but the vast majority of local students speak English as the second language

METHODOLOGY

- A phenomenographic study of the Common Core Curriculum in the University of Hong Kong
- 14 semi-structured interviews (13 Common Core teachers and the Director of the Common Core)

THE COMMON CORE CURRICULUM

- A central piece of the curriculum reform in the university
- Aiming at providing students with broad perspectives, developing among them a deeper critical understanding of the complex connections between important matters, and enhancing their generic competences such as collaboration, communication, and creativity.



Scientific and
Technological Literacy



Humanities



Global Issues



China: Culture,
State and Society

METHODOLOGY (CONT'D)

10 Male

5 full professors

4 from Arts

2 from Science

3 local Hong Kong Chinese

2 from Business and Economics

4 Female

2 associate professors

2 from Social Sciences

11 from overseas

1 from Engineering

7 assistant professors

1 from Education

1 from Architecture

1 from Medicine

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION DURING THE INTERVIEW

- The overall background and rationale of the course design;
- How the international, intercultural or global perspective has been embedded in the course and what the related challenges are;
- In what ways the course instructor has facilitated a multicultural learning environment in which students from different backgrounds could learn from each other and what the related challenges are.

FINDINGS

- A naturally unfolding story – in terms of the topic and the content

'So almost by definition of the Common Core it is 'global', built on global topics, and they are designed to get students thinking about topics in a global context that they wouldn't otherwise think about.' (R6)

I think in fact there's maybe not so much of a direct focus on internationalisation. But like [name of the Director of the Common Core] says, Common Core courses end up, whether you plan to be or not, being global and international, because we will deal with situations that are globally important. (R8)

FINDINGS (CONT'D)

- Shared practice (1): Providing or stimulating multiple perspectives and viewpoints

I found that Hong Kong students tend to conform to one perspective and they seem to believe that there is always a correct answer. I want to break this thinking so I required them to read two articles related to global warming, which provided ... exactly ... opposite causes of global warming ... I hope that they learn different perspectives and understand that scientific conclusions can contradict each other. (R3)

FINDINGS (CONT'D)

- Shared practice (2): Creating local and global interactions

... Hong Kong students typically focus on very local and micro issues and have difficulties in making the connection between local and global ... International students seem to have a broader perspective. (R3)

After presenting the global challenges at a macro level, I will ask students to propose small, day-to-day and manageable actions they could take that collectively will make a difference to the grand situations. (R6)

FINDINGS (CONT'D)

- Shared practice (3): Designing flexible assessment tasks

If using different kinds of assessment activities, students will be able to get feedback immediately and use it in other courses to build their skills ... Transferring those skills into their discipline or elsewhere help them develop into educated people, so I try to think more in terms of projects to work with students to have a physical outcome (website, video, podcast, research paper) or to do something concrete that allows them to display what they learn. (R4)

FINDINGS (CONT'D)

- Shared practice (4): Facilitating intercultural and interdisciplinary engagement

So I think it really benefits students' group work if you've got diversity in there, because people do have different points of views depending on which country they are from, which background they are from. (R9)

Even if the university is moving towards the internationalisation direction... but at the student level, it has not really been realised. Students do not interact with one another ... This is something that I find very bad about. In my classroom, I see Mainland Chinese students sit together, local students sit together, and internationals stick together. There is no communication. (R1)

FINDINGS (CONT'D)

- Shared practice (5): Using students' experiences and perspectives as learning resources

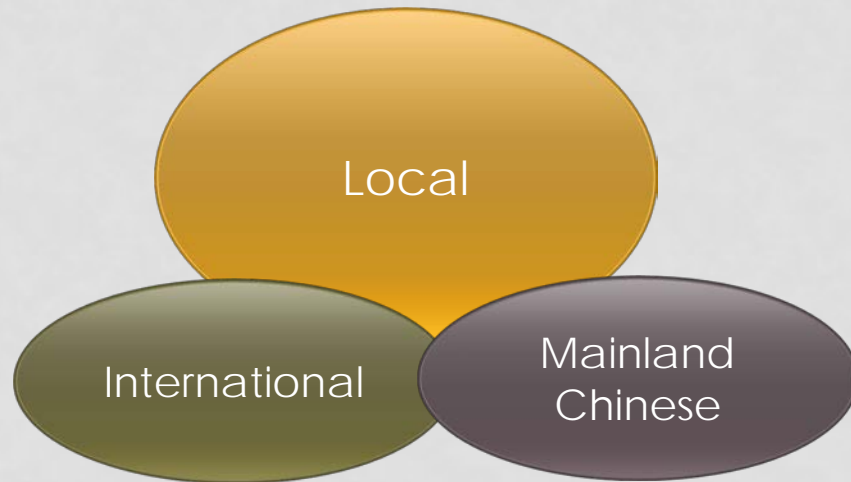
I asked students to explore their family history and carry out a project about their own life and the past. They need to present a video clip about their own history and share it with other students. The beauty is to let us students know that history is not just about incidents taking place many years ago, but is made by everyone. (R5)

It'd better focus on feelings. What is interesting is how they feel. Students reflect on cross-cultural scenarios but this needs to be based on enough trust among one another. Teacher can help students reflect on their personal attitude. (R12)

DISCUSSIONS

Practice	Frequency (Total : 13)	Literature	Uniqueness in this study
(1) Providing or stimulating multiple perspectives and viewpoints	13	Jabbar & Hardaker, 2012; Leask & Carroll, 2013	Focusing on contents and scaffolding students in developing critical thinking
(2) Creating local and global interactions	11	Leask (2015) – partially	Focusing on navigation between local and global issues and creating connections
(3) Designing flexible assessment tasks	8	Leask & Carroll, 2013 – partially (focusing on clarity and fairness)	Focusing on flexibility and openness in assessment design
(4) Facilitating intercultural and interdisciplinary engagement	7	Leask & Carroll, 2013	Focusing on interdisciplinarity but seeing great challenges in isolation of cultural groups
(5) Using students' experiences and perspectives as learning resources	4	Jabbar & Hardaker, 2012; Leask, 2015; Leask & Carroll, 2013; Ramburuth & Welch, 2005	Focusing on building trust and not to reinforce cultural stereotype

CONCLUDING REMARKS (CONT'D)



Teachers' practices focusing on tackling the (perceived) weaknesses in local students.

Support to teachers is needed especially on leveraging the diversity in the classroom.

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THANK YOU VERY MUCH