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Internationalising a school: teachers' perspectives on pedagogy, curriculum and inclusion

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Abstract: The increase of internationalisation in Australian schools marks this as a significant teaching and learning experience for many teachers, specifically those in the secondary school. This case study of a secondary school investigated the concerns of teachers impacted by the implementation of an internationalisation policy. The study examined the teachers' responses to issues often associated with internationalisation in schools: pedagogy, curriculum and student inclusion. Four key concerns emerged in the data: (i) feelings of being ill-prepared; (ii) questions about curriculum enactment and student participation; (iii) the need for greater intercultural competence; and (iv) a lack of clarity about the relationship between language and literacy. The paper explores the implications of these concerns for teachers' practices and professional development as well as the place of international students in the school community.

Keywords: *internationalisation, overseas students, schools, ESL, pedagogy*

Introduction

Secondary schools in Australia are increasingly adopting policies of internationalisation and enrolling large numbers of overseas students. In some private independent schools, recruitment of international students is well-established with specially-built language training centres and boarding facilities. Increasingly public schools are also enrolling students from overseas, the majority of whom are from Asian countries where English is a second or foreign language (Australian Education International, 2014). For many schools, the imperative to internationalise is driven by financial opportunities and an interest in diversifying the student population for the purpose of promoting intercultural experiences. The growing internationalisation of the Australian

school sector warrants closer investigation, particularly in relation to teachers and how they respond to internationalisation in their classrooms. What are teachers' perspectives on the changing educational, cultural and linguistic profiles of their students and how are they responding pedagogically? What curricula responses are being implemented to meet the changing needs of students? How are teachers' managing the process?

Such an investigation can make visible teachers' views on their own practices within the context of internationalisation. Within the whole-of-institution program of internationalisation, the investigation can foreground those practices that teachers believe are working to facilitate international student learning and participation within class and school activities. It can also discern the areas where teachers believe they are struggling and in need of assistance. Such an approach can provide policy makers, school leaders, support staff and teachers with an understanding of mainstream classroom practices during the implementation of a school-based internationalisation program.

This paper reports on a study of internationalisation implemented in a faith-based Kindergarten-Year 12 (K-12) school in Australia. The study took a case approach with particular focus on the experiences of the secondary teachers, as this was where the recruitment of international student was initially directed. At the time of the study, the school was enrolling students from Asian countries. The students were mainly from China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Solomon Islands and Taiwan and comprised 5.5% of the secondary student population in the school. The study was interested in how internationalisation was manifesting at the classroom level – what was happening in the everyday enactment of curriculum, teaching and assessment; and more specifically, how the teachers were accounting for their pedagogical practices in the context of diversifying student needs and capabilities.

Literature Review

Internationalisation in Australian secondary schooling

The numbers of international students in Australian schools have steadily increased over the past three years. Overseas enrolments in schools across the country have increased from 17 644 in 2013, to 20 539 in 2015 (Department of Education and Training (DET), 2015a ; DET, 2015b). Asian countries account for 84% of all students with the three top source countries being China (50.1%), Vietnam (8.9%) and the Republic of Korea (6.3%) (DET, 2015b).

The school sector comprises 3.3% of international enrolments across all levels of education in Australia, contributing \$691 million to the Australian economy in 2014-2015 (DET, 2015b). While small in comparison to other sectors such as higher education and vocational education, schools are of interest because of their growing international engagement and enrolments of overseas students.

Media reports have noted the growing numbers of international students in both public and private schools. Most reports have related to the popular destination states of New South Wales and Victoria (e.g. Smith, 2015; Taylor & Branley, 2015). The focus of the reports have been public schools and the high fees charged by schools. Other concerns have been the cost of homestay accommodation for students. In New South Wales, there are about 150 public schools accepting international students with the fees ranging from \$10 500 for primary students to \$14 000 for students enrolled in Years 11 and 12 (Smith, 2015). Each state education jurisdiction has an international department which actively promotes international education in its public schools. For example, the State of Victoria (Department of Education and Training) (2015) states on its website: “Schools that make internationalising a fundamental part of their teaching and learning are better placed to provide students with the knowledge, skills and attributes required for a globalised world.” In order to help schools implement internationalisation, the department commits to supporting schools by providing resources and advice as part of their learning and development strategy.

The growing phenomenon of internationalisation within Australian schools makes it a real and immediate experience for increasing numbers of teachers, particularly in secondary schools. Established expectations and patterns of interaction are being challenged, even in school settings marked by diversity. International students present different linguistic, social, and educational profiles to those familiar to many teachers. Students arrive in Australian secondary schools with prior experience of schooling in their home countries; they come from families with the financial resources to fund an overseas education; and live in domestic arrangements that range across homestay, extended family members, and shared student accommodation. Many of the students arrive as emergent bilinguals with English as an additional language. While their English levels meet school enrolment criteria, the students’ limited communicative competence in

English mean that many are challenged by tasks demanding comprehension, critical evaluation, and the production of large tracts of spoken and written text.

In the study presented here, internationalisation at the school had progressed from policy development to active recruitment of students from overseas. While international student numbers were still low in relation to the established student cohort, their presence was impacting classrooms. Teachers were expressing concerns about the changing student cohort and the ways to best respond to the new set of student needs within the established pedagogical framework of curriculum, classroom teaching and assessment.

The implementation of internationalisation

There is a small but growing body of academic literature on internationalisation in Australian schools, mirroring the growth of the sector. For example, Hattingh (2015) argues that internationalisation in schools is more than enrolling international students. Rather, internationalisation is a whole-of-school endeavour; it involves adjustments to and innovations in the school's operations: writing policy; employing a new cadre of teachers including academic language support personnel and translators; adjusting curricula; rethinking and realigning school identity; ensuring policy and practices around equality, equity and access; and improving pedagogy to include second language pedagogies and understandings of culture. Currently much of the research focuses on the student experience of internationalisation (Adelabu, 2007; Cheng, Myles & Curtis, 2004; Li, 2004; Popadiuk, 2010) with relatively less attention devoted to teachers in the schools and their views and processes of adjusting to internationalisation (Love & Arkoudis, 2004; Reeves, 2006; Tudball, 2005).

Often when enrolling international students institutions hold assumptions about change and acculturation for the students but have few expectations about teachers and their roles (Hattingh, 2015; Kettle, 2011; Love & Arkoudis, 2004). Research in secondary schools shows that culturally and linguistically diverse students are expected to “cope with a new culture (and)...make the adjustments necessary for their academic success” (Li, 2004, p. 26). The expectations are that they will adjust and ‘fit in’ to the existing classroom culture. This assimilationist expectation does little to promote cultural knowledge-sharing among students and

neutralises the pedagogical potential of the linguistic and educational resources that the students bring with them. It also stymies teachers' opportunities to extend their teaching repertoires to incorporate new knowledge and skills for the diversifying student cohort.

Teachers' practices with educationally, culturally and linguistically diverse students

Teachers are in the business of pedagogy and are responsible for the enactment and evaluation of curricula in classroom teaching and assessment. A body of literature exists about what constitutes effective teaching (Alexander, 2008; Borich, 2011; Dalton, 2008; Edwards-Groves, Anstey & Bull, 2014; Grant & Gillette, 2006; Hanna, 2004; Killen, 2013; Muijs, 2005). Synthesising this literature, six key pedagogical principles emerge, namely, that effective teachers: (i) establish authentic relationships with their students; (ii) maintain appropriate expectations of their students in terms of learning; (iii) draw on a repertoire of teaching approaches; (iv) engage in classroom level curriculum development; (v) reflect on and evaluate their teaching for the purposes of improvement; and (vi) talk with each other about pedagogy.

Teaching second language students in mainstream classroom contexts requires particular knowledge, skills and understanding. Crucially language has to be developed alongside curriculum content knowledge; integrating language, content and thinking is demanding and requires systematic planning and implementation (Gibbons, 2002) deliberately attending to the learning needs of all students. Furthermore, pedagogies need to foreground equity and inclusion, and be conducted in ways that ensure student access to high-value knowledge and skills (Edwards-Groves, Anstey & Bull, 2014). Cazden (2001) notes that language in a classroom performs three key functions: (i) the delivering of curricula knowledge; (ii) the establishment of supportive social relationships; and (iii) the presentation of a self-identity. For learners attempting to accomplish these core language functions in a second language, assistance from teachers is crucial. Teachers need to be aware of the challenges of performing in a language with limited proficiency (Horwitz, 2013) and be conversant in second language approaches and methods to support these endeavours.

For many teachers, however, second language teaching is a new and unfamiliar experience. Numerous researchers have

argued that the internationalisation program in schools should ensure that teachers are trained in second language pedagogies and are provided with resources and peer-support to assist student learning and integration into the school community (Brigaman, 2002; Pawlas & Oliva, 2008; Tudball, 2005). Teachers play a key role in international student transitions and adjustments to secondary school (Popadiuk, 2010). To this end, the current study focussed on teachers' accounts of factors impacting on their capacity to meet expectations around teaching, curriculum and assessment in a changing classroom context.

The Study

This reported investigation is a case study of teachers' perspectives on internationalisation and pedagogies for internationalisation at an independent secondary school in Queensland, Australia. The study was interested in the ways that the teachers made meaning of the changes in their classrooms and their teaching responses. Implementing a case study approach meant that teachers' perspectives could be explored in depth at a time marked by changing social, linguistic, institutional and academic conditions (Creswell, 2014). The study was guided by two research questions related to the teachers' perspectives:

1. How do the teachers represent the international students as learners in their classes?
2. How do the teachers represent their teaching for internationalisation in relation to increased cultural, linguistic and educational diversity in the student cohort?

Research site, participants and data collection

The student enrolment at this secondary campus during data collection was 290 students of whom 16 were international students. The secondary campus comprised 25 teachers and four administrative staff members. Participation in the study involved 24 of the 25 teachers. Twenty teachers completed the questionnaires. Three focus groups were conducted with 18 teachers: two of the focus groups had five teachers each while the third focus group comprised eight teachers. Two teachers could not attend the focus groups and instead, took part in individual interviews. The questionnaires for the teachers contained twelve questions clustering about the following themes: (i) teaching and experience in the classroom; (ii) exposure and interactions with other cultures and countries; and (iii) specific classroom changes or training

done for working with international students.

The questionnaires were completed first by all participants followed up with focus group sessions which took place after school. The teacher focus group and individual interview questions asked the teachers to elaborate on internationalisation at the school. Questions included:

- How do you find working with ESL students?
- In the questionnaire the question was asked about challenges the international students face, do you have anything to add to that?
- What strategies do you use to help the international students with these challenges?
- What contribution do you see international students making in this school?

The data generated in the study provided a comprehensive and detailed account of the teachers' views on their practices for internationalisation. The analysis of the data involved using NVivo software to organise themes. Through an induction process themes were identified and coded (Creswell, 2009). This process was iterative in that it was ongoing and constantly defining and redefining themes as the analysis shuttled forwards and backwards across the data.

Discussion of findings

Four macro-themes emerged from the teacher data. These themes can be summarised as follows: (i) teachers' concerns about a lack of preparedness for internationalisation in the classroom; (ii) concerns about enacting curriculum and class participation; (iii) concerns about a lack of intercultural competence in the face of diversifying student backgrounds and experiences; and (iv) concerns about reconciling language and academic literacy. Each of these themes is addressed below.

Teachers' concerns about a lack of preparedness

Teachers report feelings of being ill-equipped to meet international students' needs. Fifteen teachers indicated a willingness to make an effort to engage in pedagogies for internationalisation but had no defined plans for ways to do this. Teacher 4 said:

Knowing how on earth to help them (international students)...
I have no training in ESL, I find it very difficult to know really how to assist them...And I feel very frustrated in not being able to assist them.

Within the focus group sessions, the phrase *put up with* was used by a number of teachers:

you put up with them in your class because you just don't know how to help them pass (*Teacher 15*).

And I felt completely useless. So yes, you do as Teacher 15 says – kind of put up with them in your class (*Teacher 16*).

The phrasal verb *to put up with something* refers to the action of tolerating or enduring something unpleasant. The teachers' use of this phrasal verb foregrounds a type of tolerance in the face of a difficult situation that was not of their making.

Part of this view linked to the concerns among many teachers that the school had not informed them adequately about the nature of internationalisation nor prepared them pedagogically. Despite the school policy-makers and leaders developing plans for internationalisation over the decade leading to actual student recruitment, teachers were unfamiliar with these policies and argued that they had not been informed about them. One teacher expressed his views as follows:

I feel like they're here, but we don't seem to have much process to actually help them succeed (*Teacher 1*).

Teacher 11 commented:

I guess just educating the staff would probably be a start maybe, just to let everybody know this is what we want you to do.

School policies provide clarification on the beliefs and expectations for standards, and practices within the school; they guide governance for school leaders and the roles and responsibilities of teachers (Sergiovanni, Kelleher, McCarthy & Wirt, 2004). To the teachers, the policies on internationalisation had not been communicated clearly and little assistance had been provided on what it meant for their practices in the classroom. Teacher 1 continued that without clear direction from policy, the following was occurring:

We talk about it (*the school and its implementation of the internationalisation program*) a bit, but what do we actually do, now I'm talking from a teacher's perspective, and it's different possibly for that room over there [*indicates the ESL room*]. What do we do? We definitely seem to just abandon them (*the students*) almost. That's what it seems like.

Another institutional factor contributing to the teachers' concerns about being unprepared to cater for the international students was a lack of information from enrolment officers about the students' backgrounds. The administration processes were not set up to pass on information. Teacher 12 reported:

I don't know who they (*the international students*) are, I don't know the difference... I haven't been told if they are in my year 8.

Teacher 15 asked:

So, who are our international students?...*[list of international student read]*... I didn't know that.

For the teachers much of the grievance about this issue was that enrolment data was collected from the students but not passed on to the teachers, in what was an administrative process problem. There was a sense that the institution was not affording them all available support to help prepare for international students.

Concerns about enacting curriculum and class participation

The data indicate awareness among the teachers of their responsibility for student learning and ensuring student participation and inclusion in class activities. The relationship between curriculum and classroom teaching (Alexander, 2008) emerged in some of the teachers' accounts. For example, some were concerned that the curriculum contained little focus on differentiation which made it difficult to engage with the different knowledge systems and educational experiences of the international students. As Teacher 9 noted:

... we just have a one size fits all programme.

In the focus groups many teachers indicated awareness of concepts related to collaborative and inquiry-based teaching and learning like *working one-on-one*, *scaffolding* and *group work*. For the most part, however, they conceded that they adopted a traditional teaching approach (Cazden, 2001) in order to '*get through*' (Teacher 4) the content. This tyranny of content coupled with administrative factors like timetabling and assessment schedules had a major influence on teachers' pedagogical choices. The curricula demands of the situation washed back into teaching where teachers found themselves often using teacher-centred methods dominated by teacher talk and student listening.

In these classrooms marked by teacher talk, the teachers

were aware they often overlooked the international students.

It's easy (*for international students*) to sit up the back often or somewhere in class where they are quiet and don't attract your attention. So it's quite easy at the end of the period to say goodbye, but have no other interaction or make them feel included (*Teacher 1*).

Another teacher stated:

I find all my international students are lovely to teach and: ... sit there quietly working away. I have to really make a conscious decision to try and get across to them and check their work just as I would all the other students who have their hands up and calling out and asking questions and things like that. (*Teacher 16*)

The analysis found that the teachers considered it the students' responsibility to initiate participation in class activities.

I think another thing that I have noticed, I don't know if it is a cultural thing or whether it's based on their level of understanding, but often a number of the students I have won't ask for help. Whether it's because they don't understand what's happening in class at that point in time and don't know what to ask for or whether they don't ask because it's cultural, I'm not sure. (*Teacher 5*)

Teacher 4 shared a similar understanding as Teacher 5: ... they don't participate in class discussion.

This aligns with other studies that found teachers expect ESL students to self-nominate to speak and ask questions in class discussions (e.g. Faltis & Wolfe, 1999; Li, 2004). For example,

... because I'm not an ESL teacher and I don't speak their language and they aren't proactive in coming to ask for help... (*Teacher 16*).

These teacher expectations fail to understand the reticence that ESL users experience when faced with performing in the language, especially in front of native speakers (Kettle, 2011). Furthermore, pedagogies of participation are culturally-imbued and highly contextualised (Alexander, 2008). In classroom situations with students from different cultural and educational backgrounds, a highly effective strategy is when the teacher actively nominates them to speak (Kettle, 2011). Such a teaching strategy supports student participation in a context where it is highly valued. It also affords the student speaking rights and a discursive

space to make her/his point in the second language.

Concerns about language and cultural competence

Evident in the interview and focus group data is recognition among the teachers that their own cross-cultural knowledge and skills need expanding. There were also explicit concerns about students' English levels, especially in relation to comprehension. Some of the teachers were at a loss about how to respond, for example:

You know they don't even get the question so how do you help them when they just don't even understand what you're asking them to do... (Teacher 15)

And I felt completely useless. I felt very much like in class they didn't understand what I was saying and it's English... And that was really difficult because you do kind of think well, what else am I going to do? (Teacher 16)

Cultural concerns among teachers extended to the students' commitment to the school's Christian faith. Some teachers assumed that the students were Buddhist because many came from Asian countries.

I actually have found out that more of them are Christian than I thought. I just made the assumption that they were all Buddhist or something. (Teacher 15)

Teachers also assumed that all Asian-looking students were international students. For example, one teacher referred to his nomination techniques in class discussions: *I'll try the next Asian student, or international student I should say* (Teacher 11). The teacher's comment assuming Asian-looking students were international was echoed by other teachers.

These assumptions based on visual appearance point to stereotyping in the absence of more informed understandings and experiences. For many teachers there was a pervasive sense of cultural confusion; it appeared as a mix of well-meaningness and hesitancy about how to proceed appropriately. For example, Teacher 16 said:

... I don't ask my international students questions because I don't want to embarrass them if they don't know the answer or if they can't articulate the answer.

The teacher's well-meaningness is evident but results in a

lack of opportunity for international students to present their ideas and represent themselves proactively within the class. Positive self-representation and legitimation, enabled by speaking opportunities scaffolded by the teacher, are crucial for second language students in mainstream classroom contexts (Miller, 2003). Despite the best of intentions, these opportunities were lost to the students in Teacher 16's class.

Many teachers were mindful of changing culture contexts as a potential source of dislocation for the students. They were sympathetic to students being away from their families and support networks and that this loss of connection could affect the students' well-being. There appeared to be common acceptance among teachers of culture shock as an issue for international students. For some teachers, this acceptance did not extend to living arrangements. The concern was that certain students were without parental guidance and as a result were not focusing on their studies. There were concerns that students were socialising and staying out late; one teacher (Teacher 4) even mentioned that some students might be gambling. The pervasive view was that these particular international students formed a cohort that was not aligned with the school's positions on faith and academic endeavour.

The teachers' accounts point to assumptions and characterisations of students that were often reductive and stereotyping. Interestingly all teachers recognised that their cross-cultural awareness and capabilities in intercultural communication were limited. Intercultural communication demands that the sociolinguistic choices in the interactions between interlocutors are appropriate (do not violate social and linguistic norms) and effective (accomplish their goals) (Hua, 2011). The teachers felt that they were unable to access the social and cultural worlds of the students in order to assist with acculturation to the Australian context. Many expressed a need for greater assistance from the school in this area of their teaching:

Do we have a mechanism where we keep a tab on all of this? Surely there needs to be a mechanism...where we know what's happening. Where we get in touch with each other, whether it's pastoral support...academics...ESL, whatever it is, some sort of liaison so we actually know what is happening with these kids...
(Teacher 2)

Concerns about reconciling language and academic literacy

The most repeated teacher concern in the data was international students' limited English language proficiency. To gain enrolment at the school, international students had to achieve level five on the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA) Bandscales based on in-house literacy tests conducted by the ESL teacher.

A number of teachers articulated the belief that students should learn English to the level of high school proficiency before enrolling at the school:

They should be somewhere else where they can learn their English first and then come here later on... (*Teacher 10*).

This view was widespread among teachers and has been noted in other sectors such as higher education. For example, Kettle (2011) found that many university teachers also attribute international students' academic struggles to low English language levels. This view, however, conflates language and academic literacy and ignores the point that academic genres need to be learned and taught at school. These genres remain a mystery for students from other educational systems. Kettle's argument is that teachers have a responsibility to teach these genres in their content classes for the benefit of all students, both international and domestic. This same argument can be directed at schooling and the need for teachers to explicitly teach 'genres of power' (Luke, 1996), that is, genres and academic text types favoured and required within the curriculum. This expectation aligns with the expectation that international students need all curriculum teachers, not just the ESL teachers, to pedagogically support them with their academic English practices (Selinker & Gass, 2008). Teachers need approaches and methods for assisting students with both their language and literacy needs in the curriculum, especially in secondary schooling (Gibbons, 2002; Hammond, 2001).

For many teachers in the study, the problems of student English were the ESL teacher's domain. For fifteen teachers, the ESL teacher's role was as follows:

She's the person responsible for them. They've got a point of contact, somebody they know that's really on their side and will fight their battles for them, they can have confidence in... (*Teacher 17*)

The problem with outsourcing English language issues to the ESL teacher was that the school's support program was limited.

Students were withdrawn from regular classes once a week if they scored less than level 6 on the NLLIA Bandscales. The recognised dilemma was that the ESL students spent most of their school time in the mainstream classroom, creating the need for teachers to reconcile language and academic literacy for students in their particular curriculum areas. For many of the teachers there was little in their teaching repertoire that explicitly related to language-based content teaching. Many expressed a desire for more support and professional development in this area.

Conclusion

This study examined the perspectives of teachers at a secondary faith-based school undergoing the initial phase of internationalisation. The teachers constituted a large section of staff experiencing changes in the profiles of their classes as increasing numbers of international students enrolled in the school. The study found that teachers' concerns centred around four main areas: (i) unsupportive institutional processes; (ii) restricted teaching repertoires; (iii) limited cross-cultural communication awareness and competence; and (iv) incapacity to align second language pedagogies with curriculum content delivery. These concerns co-existed in the teachers' views with their sense of responsibility towards the learning outcomes of their students. The teachers were also explicit in their sympathies for the students' well-being in terms of living in a different culture and being away from family and friends.

More implicit in the teachers' accounts were their stereotyping tendencies in the absence of culturally-responsive understandings, experiences, and communication strategies. For example, many teachers assumed that students would 'fit in' with local students and the school community. This assumption posited involvement as the international student responsibility without consideration of local receptivity and hospitality. It also failed to recognise the need for the school to mediate and assist the integration of international students. Other studies have found that often after initial welcome ceremonies, the international students were left to "sink or swim" and there was little ongoing contact between international and domestic students (Li, 2004; Love & Arkoudis, 2004).

Many of the teachers canvassed in this study expressed an interest in and need for further knowledge and skills to be better equipped themselves for teaching their diversifying student cohort. They were also overt in their critique of the administrative

processes in the school and the need for greater collaboration around internationalisation. While internationalisation had been an agenda for school leaders for some time, teachers believed that policy was being imposed top-down without negotiation. The policy agenda was manifesting most acutely in their classrooms without due recognition of the pedagogical struggles that teachers were experiencing. Many teachers were interested in the benefits of greater cultural diversity in their classrooms and felt bereft of the means to accomplish it successfully. A further study outcome was the opportunity for teachers to voice their concerns about the internationalisation program. No other platform was available to them to articulate and negotiate their responses to the new policy. In the reflexive relationship between the study and participation in interviews and focus groups sessions, teachers were able to derive clearer understandings of the implications of internationalisation for their own pedagogies, cultural assumptions, and institutional needs. The findings provide insights into the process of internationalisation at the classroom level from the perspective of teachers. As the frontline workers in the increasing internationalisation of schools in Australia, it is crucial that their views are explicated and interpreted for the purposes of improvement in teaching and learning.

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